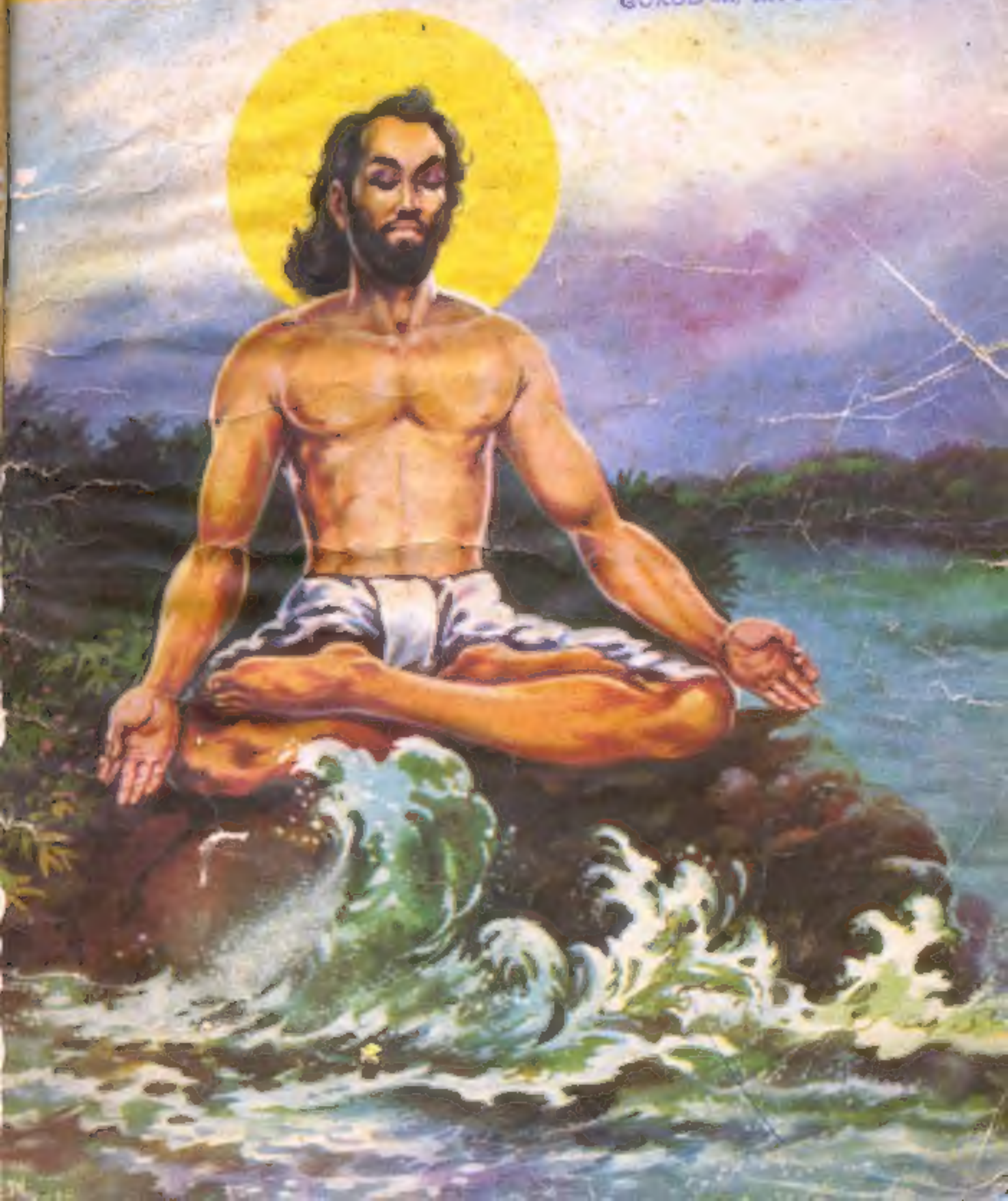


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# GURU RAVIDAS

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## Guru Ravidas

Guru Ravidas (c. A.D. 1450-1540) was the son of a cobbler who lived in the village of Mandua Deeh near Varanasi. He is also known as Raidas, Rohidas, Ruidas and so on.

Very few authenticated facts of his life are known. His extant poems give us an idea, however hazy, of the poet-saint who attained union with God. It is said that Kabir, Nanak, Dhanna and Meera were his contemporaries and that when he was very old, Guru Nanak, then a young man, came to pay his respects to him.

Ravidas' philosophy is a blend of the different faiths and beliefs of his day. He considered differentiation between man and man on grounds of caste, religion and worldly possessions as artificial and exhorted his followers—commonly known as Ravidasis—to strive for a classless society. Ravidas renounced the comforts of the world but not his worldly duties. He did not live on alms, as other saints did, but earned his living as a shoe-maker. Obviously Ravidas firmly believed in the sanctity of honest labour.

The following pages tell the story of Ravidas based mainly on his poems.

\*

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# GURU RAVIDAS

AT KASHI, A DEVOUT COUPLE  
CAME EVERY MORNING FOR A  
HOLY DIP IN THE GANGA  
AND THEY UTTERED BUT  
ONE PRAYER.

O SURYA,  
MIGHTIER THAN ALL,  
GRANT US A  
CHILD.

O GREAT RAVI\*,  
MAY A CHILD  
BE BORN TO  
US.

YOU  
SHALL HAVE  
YOUR WISH.

SANDAN  
SWAMI...

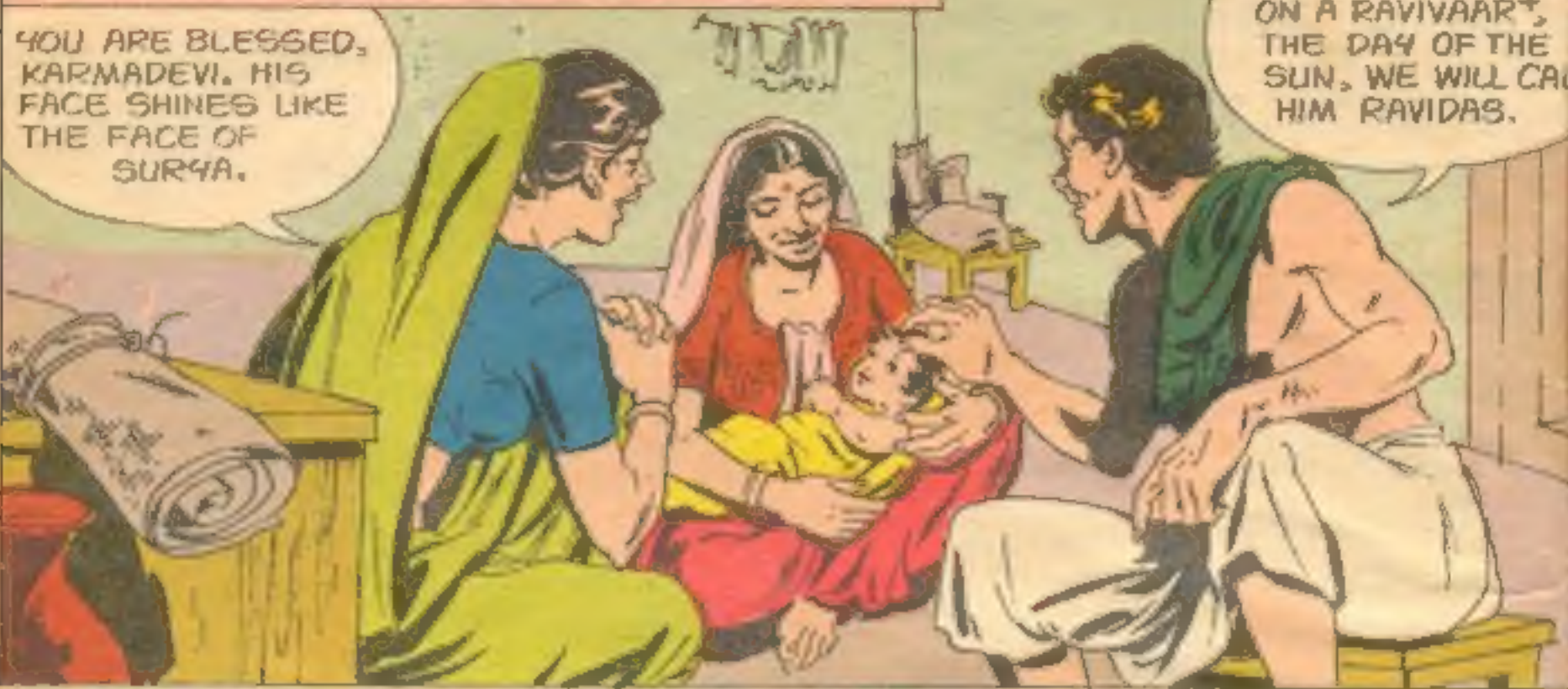
REJOICE, GOOD PEOPLE,  
FOR A SON IS SOON  
TO BE BORN TO  
YOU.



AND SURE ENOUGH, IN COURSE OF TIME —

YOU ARE BLESSED, KARMADEVI. HIS FACE SHINES LIKE THE FACE OF SURYA.

AS HE WAS BORN ON A RAVIVAAR<sup>+</sup>, THE DAY OF THE SUN, WE WILL CALL HIM RAVIDAS.



THE CHILD RAVIDAS GREW UP AND BEGAN TO HELP HIS FATHER, RAGHAV CHAMAR, IN HIS WORK.



EVERY FEW DAYS, RAVIDAS, WITH HIS FRIENDS AND RELATIVES, WENT TO THE NEARBY TOWN OF VARANASI. ONE DAY —

HO, THERE! HO... YOU CHAMARS\*!











JUST THEN, ANOTHER CHAMAR CAME UP.

SON, WE WILL  
HANDLE THE BULLOCKS.  
YOU GO TO THE  
TOWN-GATE. THERE  
IS A DEAD CALF  
THERE WHICH WILL  
BE EASY FOR YOU  
TO CARRY.



RAVIDAS, DID  
YOU HEAR  
ME?

UH...? WHAT? WHAT  
DID YOU SAY?

WHAT'S THE  
MATTER WITH  
YOU?



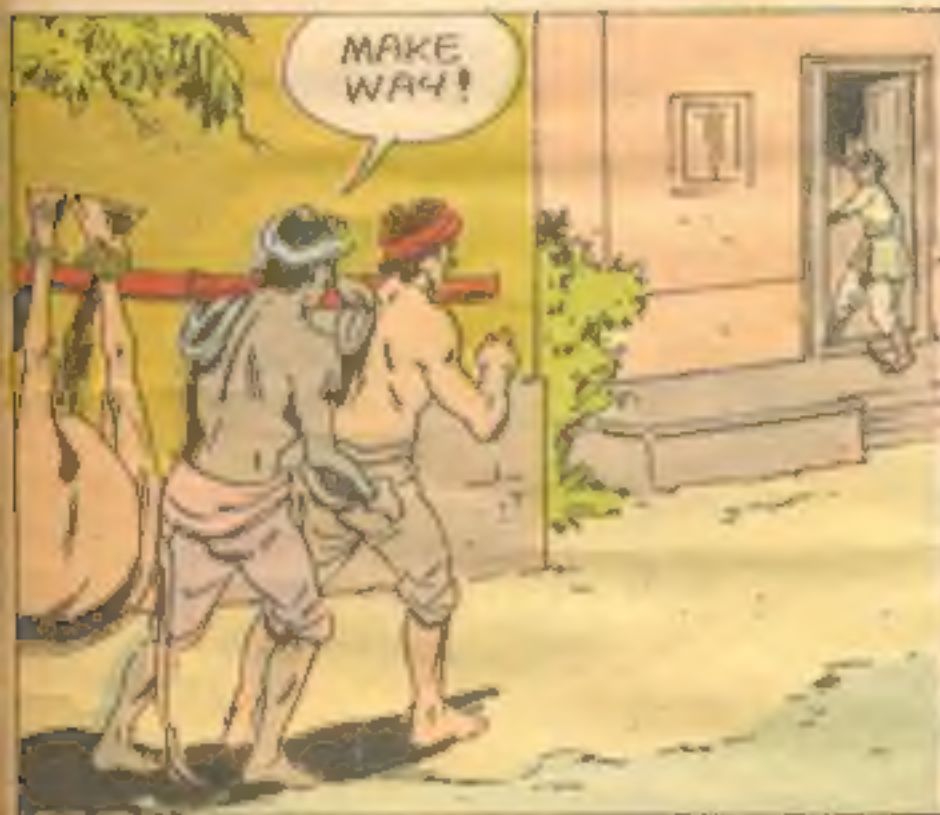
N- NOTHING.

THEN RUN TO  
THE TOWN-GATE  
BEFORE SOMEONE  
ELSE TAKES THE  
CALF. GO!





SOON, THE CHAMARS WERE READY TO GO BACK TO THEIR VILLAGE.





POLLUTERS!  
TRAFFICKERS IN DEAD  
ANIMALS! COULDN'T  
YOU HAVE SHOUTED  
THAT YOU WERE  
COMING?



BUT WE DID! SO WHILE  
WE DID OUR BIT, YOU  
DIDN'T DO YOURS,  
HOLY ONE! YOU  
DIDN'T HEAR US.



RAVIDAS  
CRYING?



BUT WHY?  
SURELY  
NOT BECAUSE...



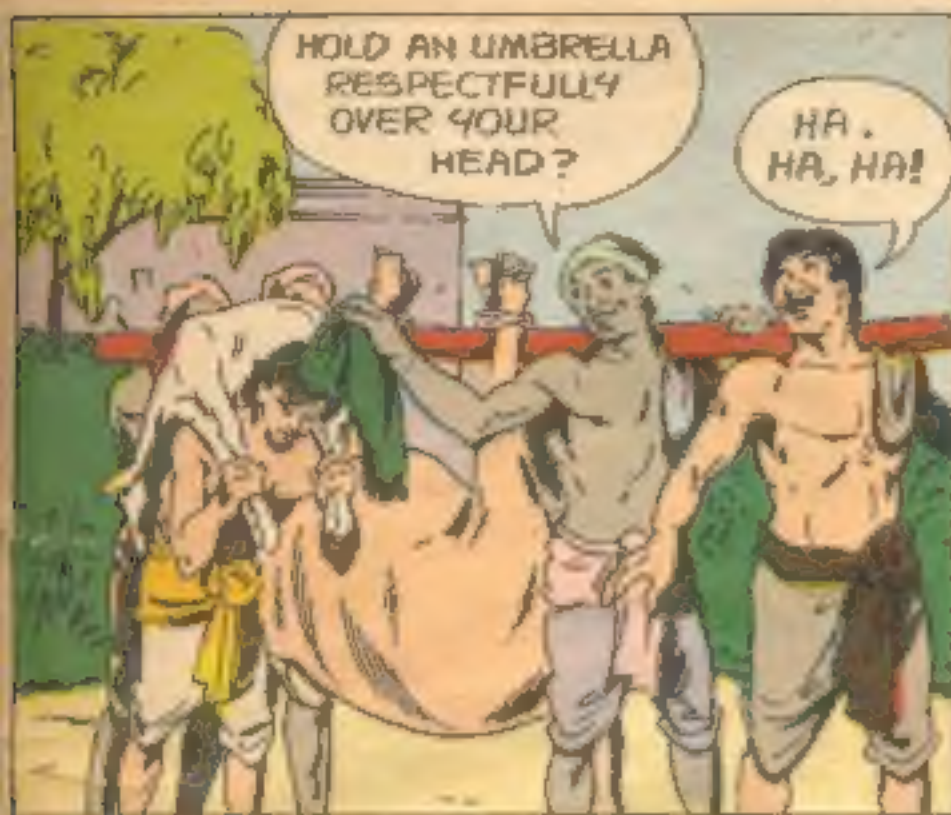
RAVIDAS!  
YOU ARE A  
CHAMAR,  
BOY!



WHAT DO YOU  
EXPECT PEOPLE  
TO DO? BOW  
BEFORE YOU?









FROM THAT DAY ON, RAVIDAS STOPPED GOING OUT ALTOGETHER.



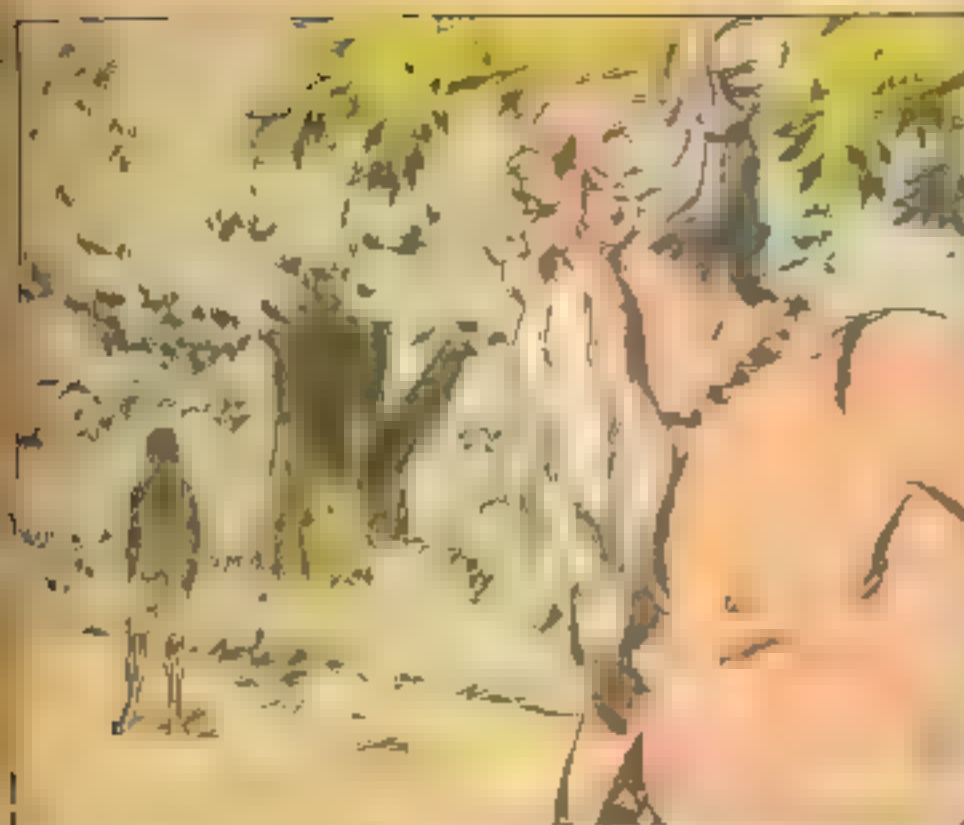
ALL DAY HE SAT, LOST IN HIS OWN THOUGHTS.



SUDDENLY, ONE DAY —



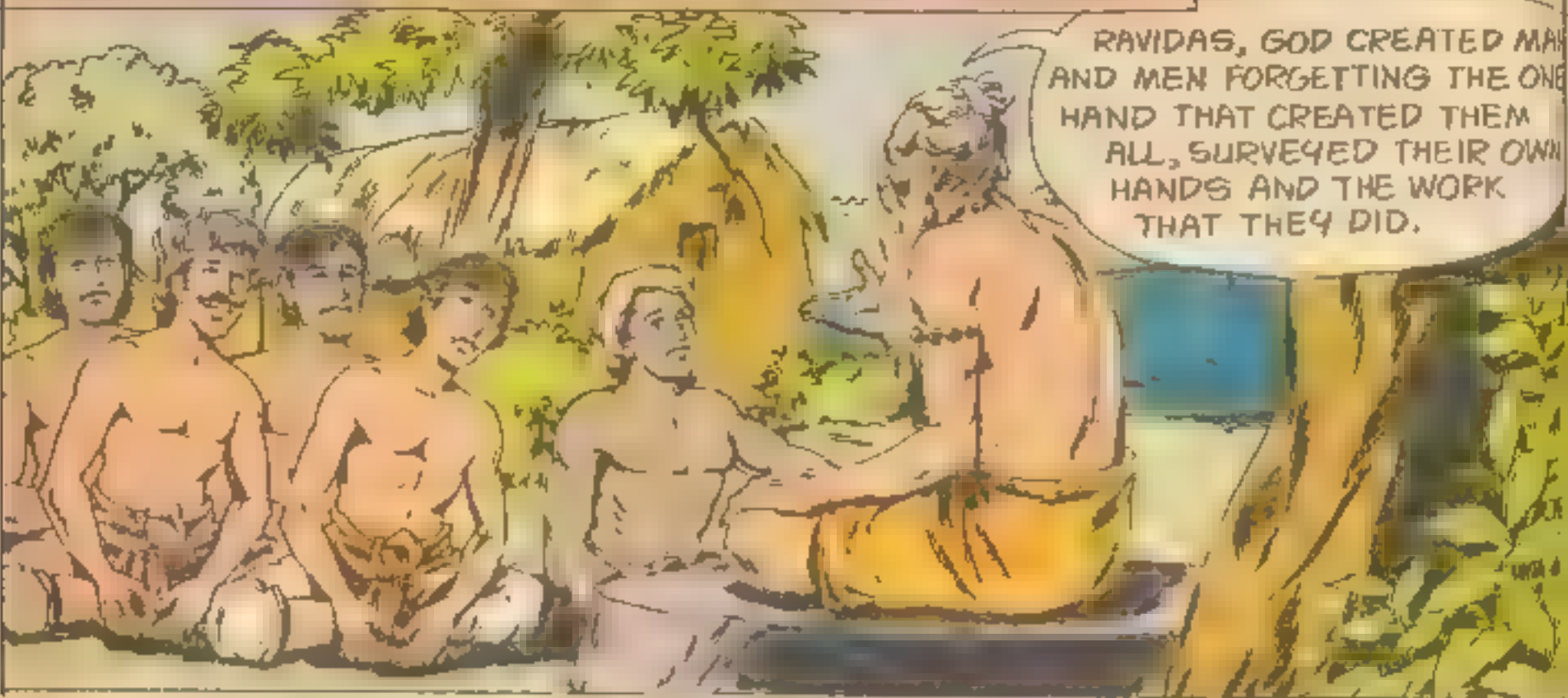




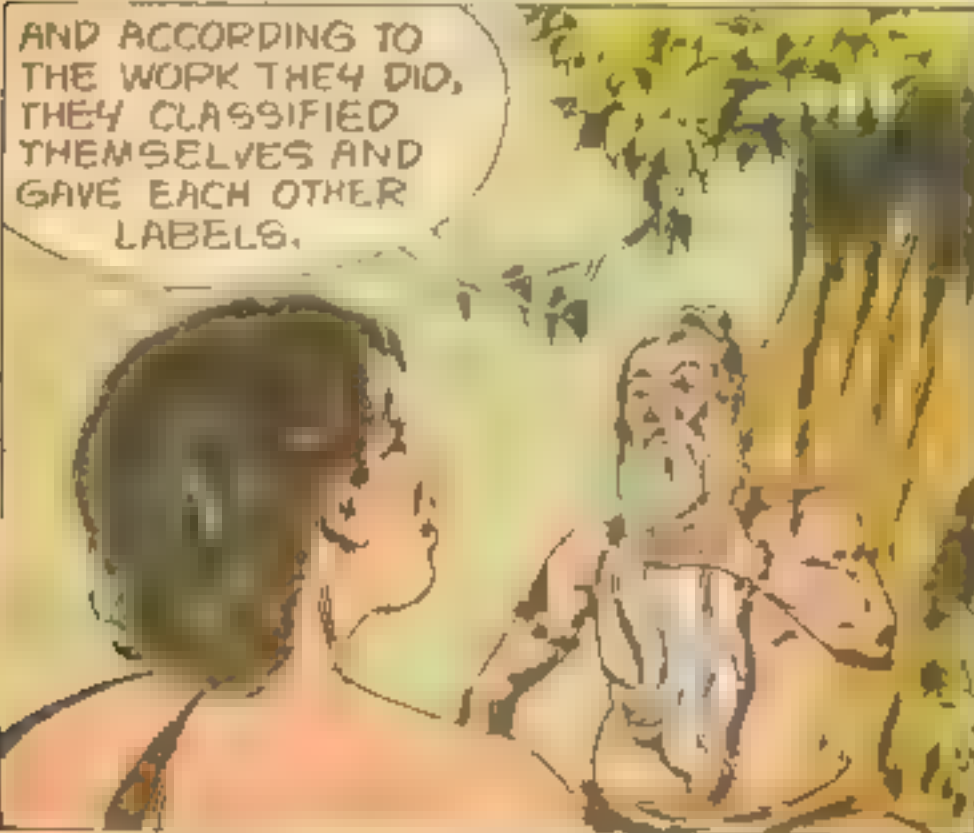


SANDAN SWAMI ACCEPTED RAVIDAS AS ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES.

RAVIDAS, GOD CREATED MAN AND MEN FORGETTING THE ONE HAND THAT CREATED THEM ALL, SURVEYED THEIR OWN HANDS AND THE WORK THAT THEY DID.



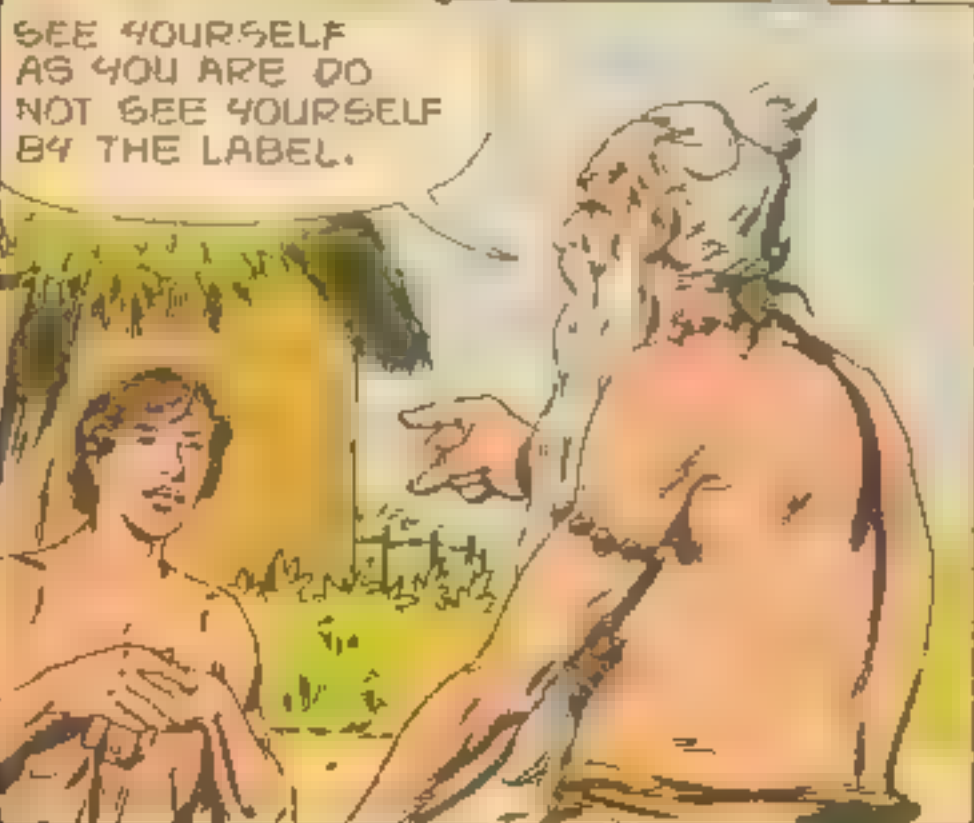
AND ACCORDING TO THE WORK THEY DID, THEY CLASSIFIED THEMSELVES AND GAVE EACH OTHER LABELS.



CHAMAR, BRAHMAN SHUDRA, ARE THE MEANINGLESS LABELS INVENTED BY IGNORANT MEN.



SEE YOURSELF AS YOU ARE DO NOT SEE YOURSELF BY THE LABEL.

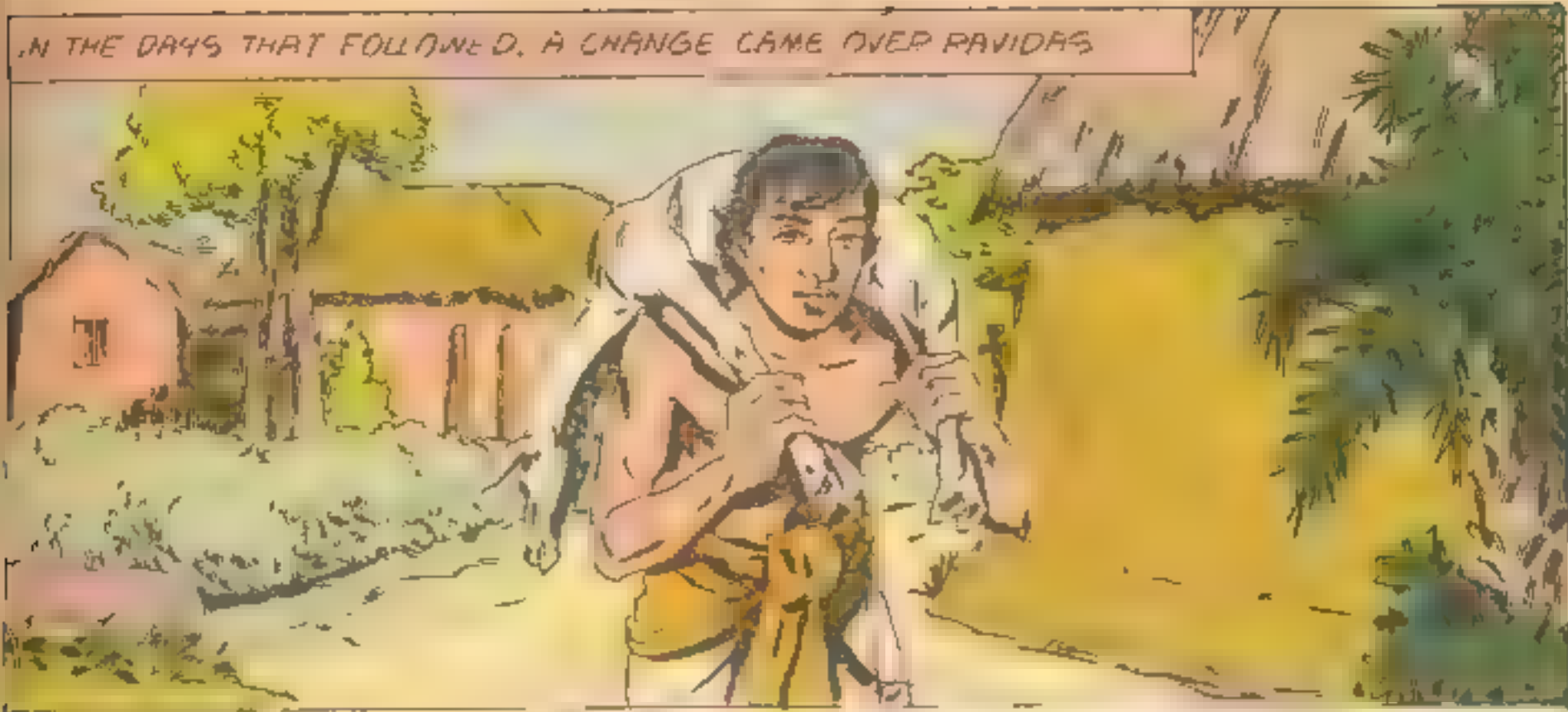


SEE .. MYSELF... AS I AM ... SEE MYSELF... AS AM...





IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, A CHANGE CAME OVER RAVIDAS



A CHAMARI...  
YOU FOOL, HOW  
DAPE YOU CROSS  
MY...

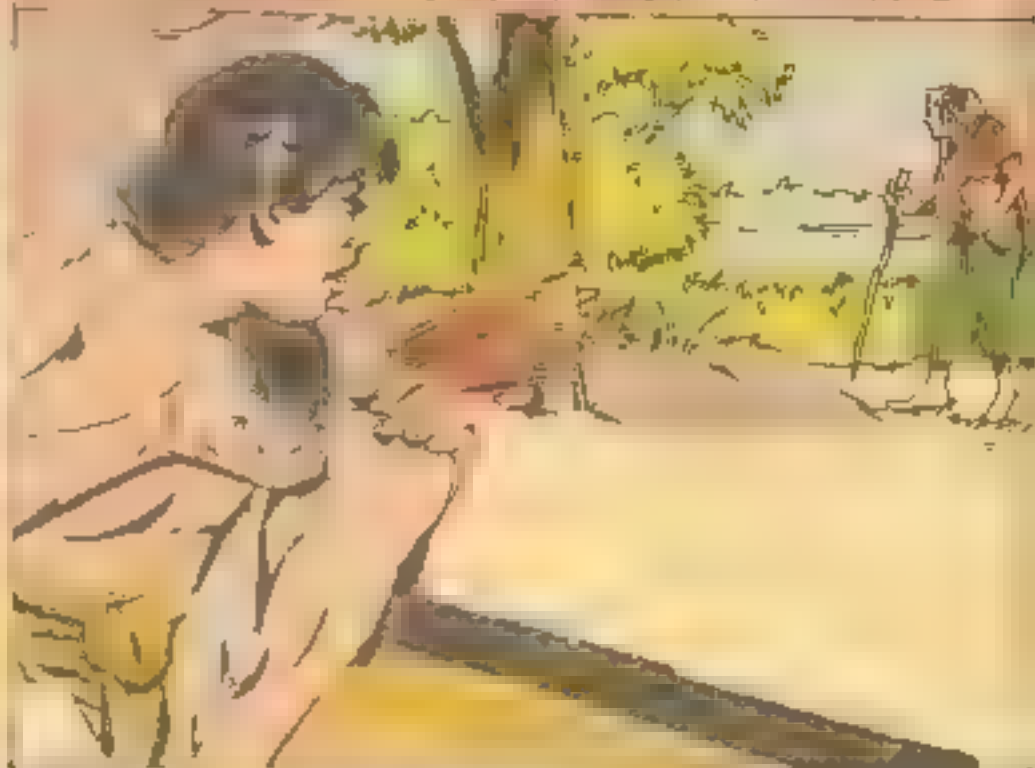


IN SEEING HIMSELF AS HE  
WAS, RAVIDAS HAD FORGOTTEN  
THE CHAMAR HE WAS  
SUPPOSED TO BE.



AND AS HE GREW TO KNOW HIMSELF

... HE BEGAN TO SEE HIMSELF IN OTHERS

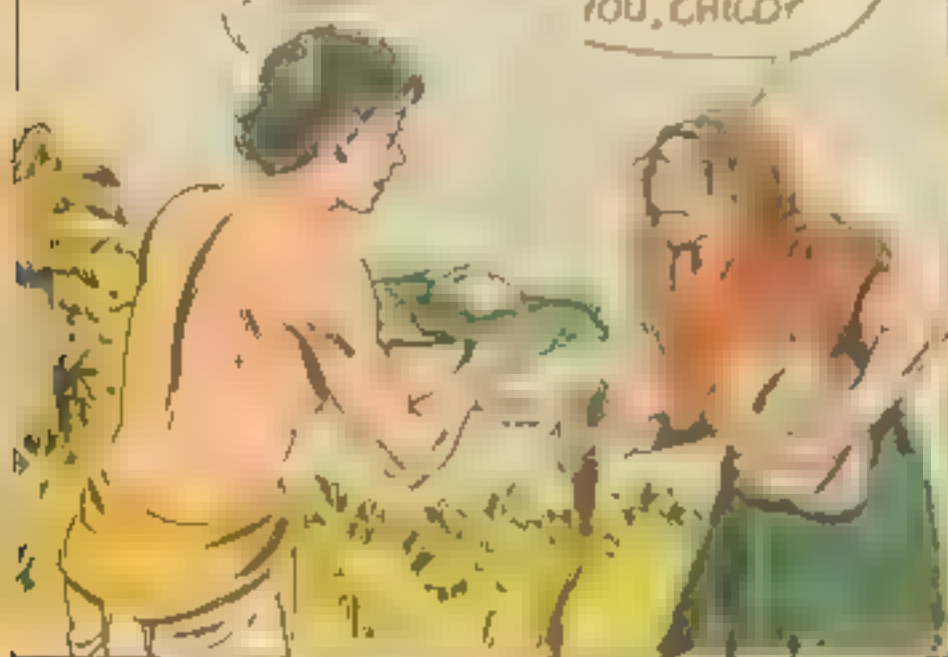


MOTHER, PLEASE  
ACCEPT THIS  
FOOD

BUT  
WHAT ABOUT  
YOU, CHILD?

OH I ...  
I HAVE  
ALREADY  
EATEN

THEN I WILL  
TAKE IT THANK  
YOU, MY  
CHILD



HENCE SO IT BECAME ONE DAY





SRS, PLEASE  
ACCEPT THESE  
SANDALS

THAT IS KIND  
OF YOU, MY  
BOY

AS HE WALKED AWAY —

RAVDAS RAN HOME AND —

THEN HE RAN BACK TO THE WOMAN

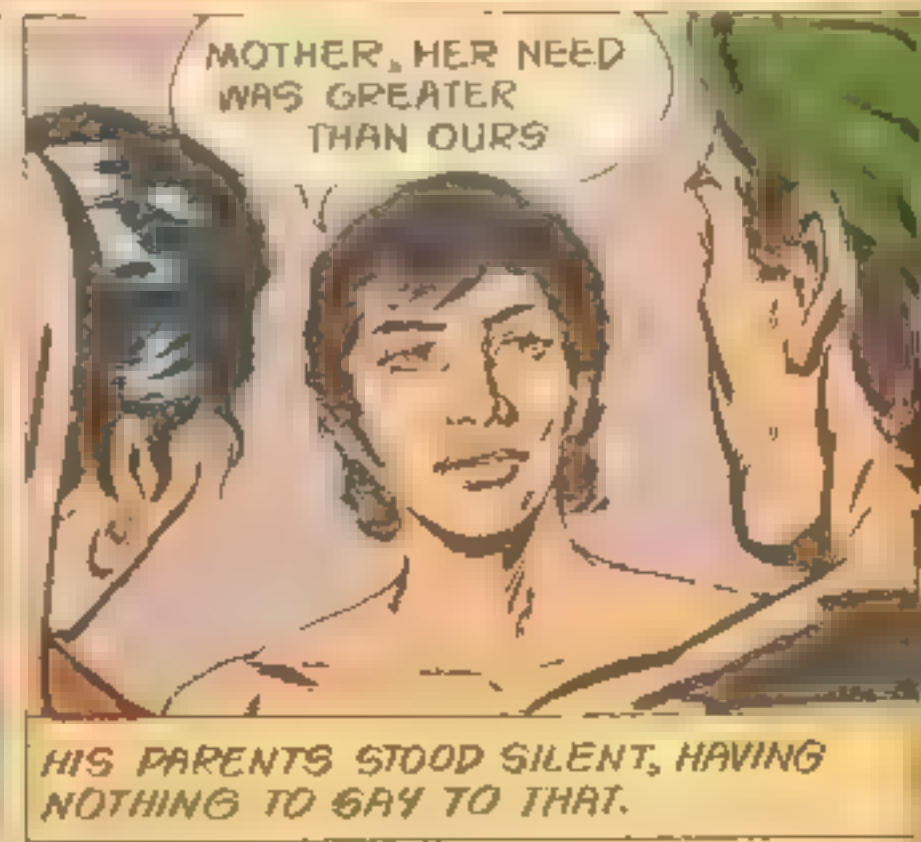
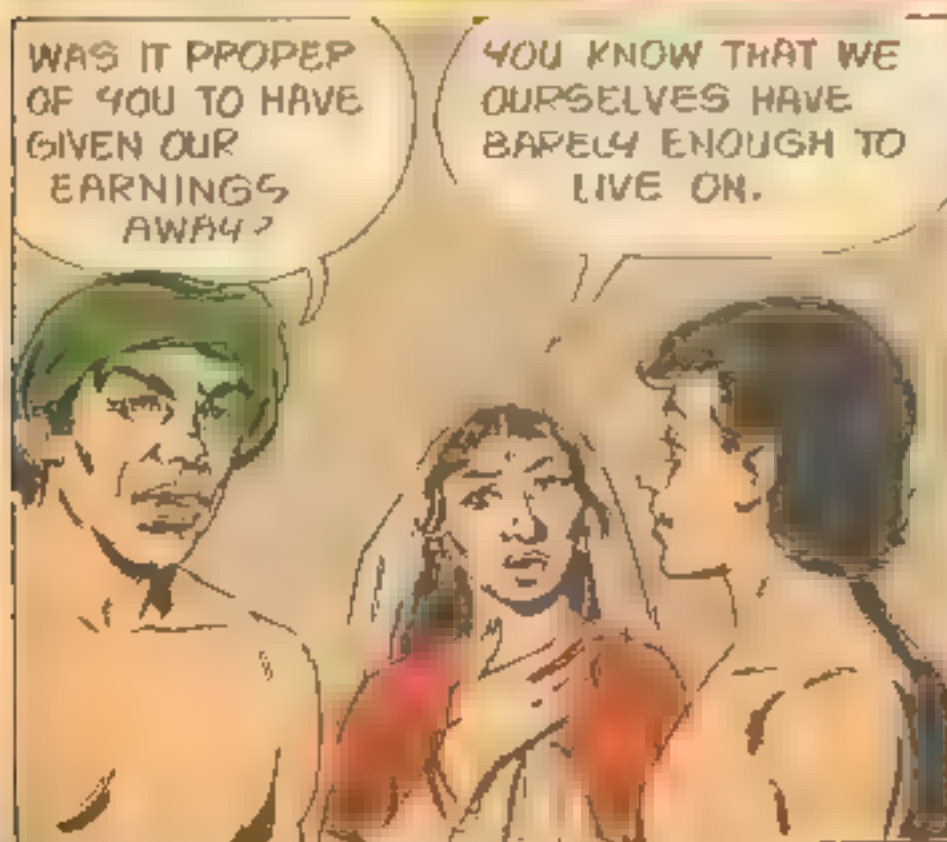
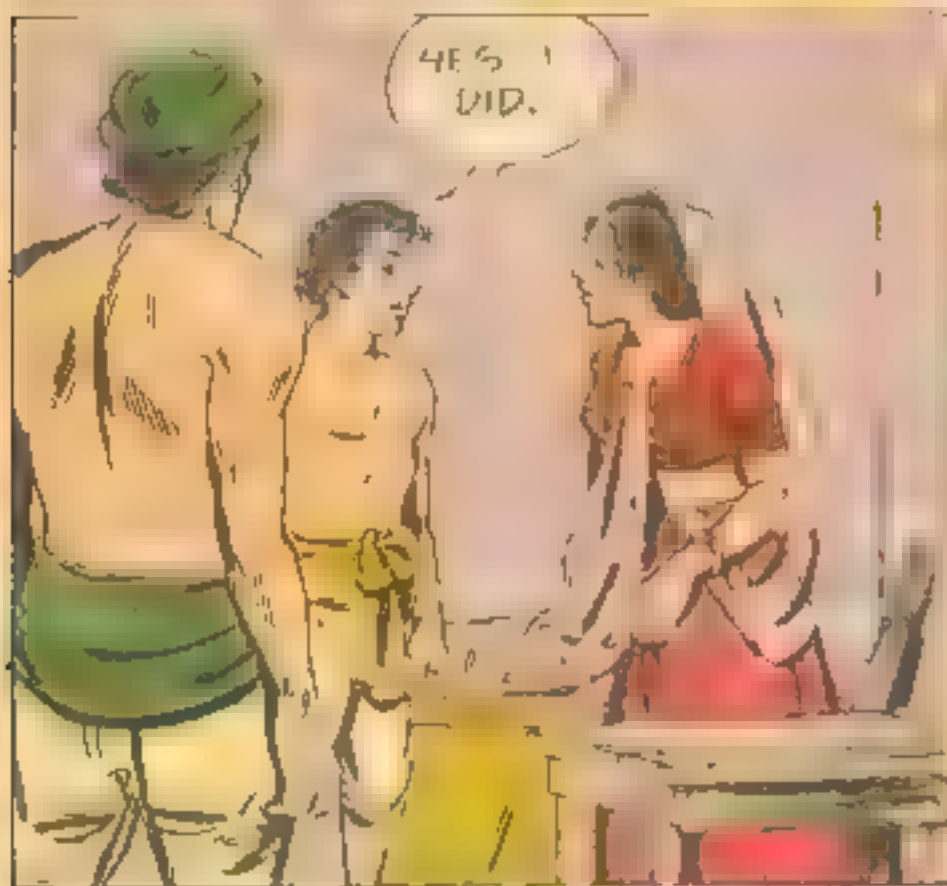
PLEASE TAKE  
THIS MONEY AND  
BUY THE CHILD  
SOME MILK

MAY GOD BLESS  
YOU FOR THINKING  
OF THE NEEDY.

AND KEEP  
THESE SANDALS  
TOO



WHEN RAVIDAS RETURNED HOME —

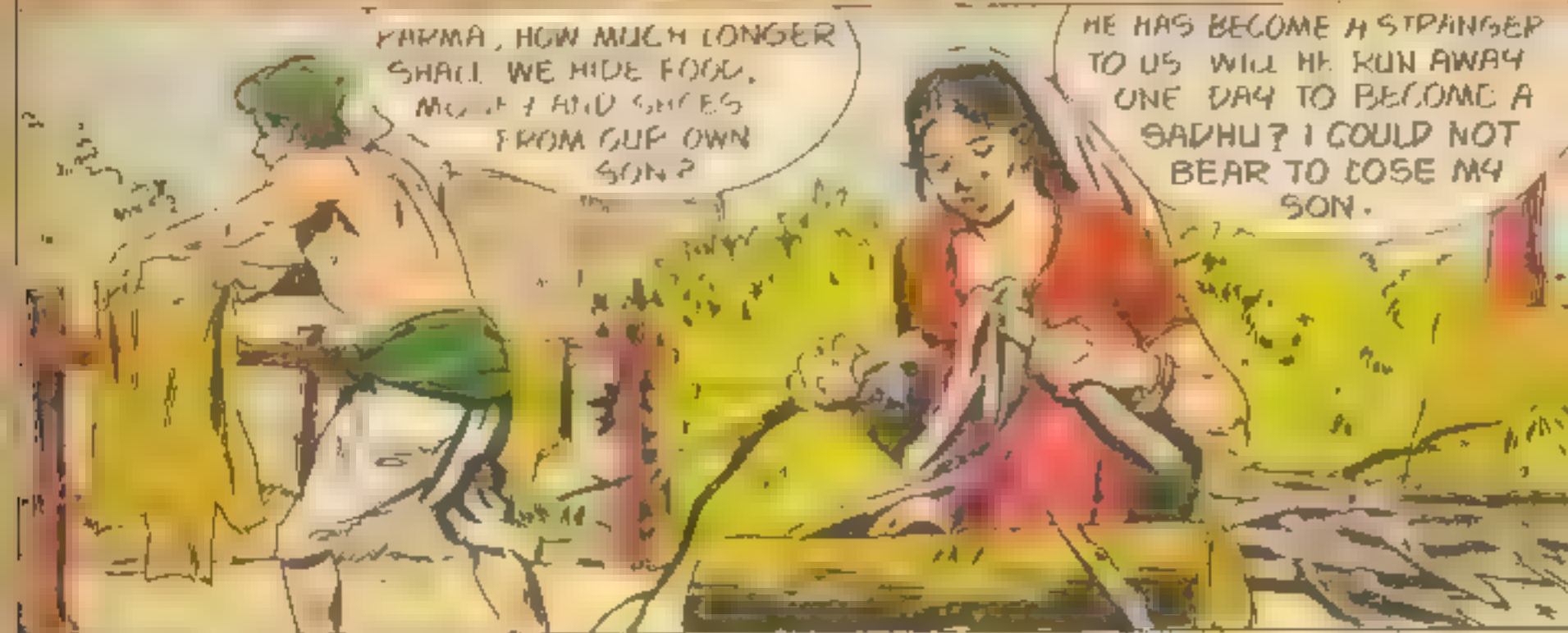




THE YEARS PASSED. RAVIDAS WORKED HARD AND DILIGENTLY, AS BEFORE, BUT HIS THOUGHTS WERE ALWAYS ELSEWHERE



HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT A SOURCE OF WORRY HE HAD BECOME TO HIS PARENTS



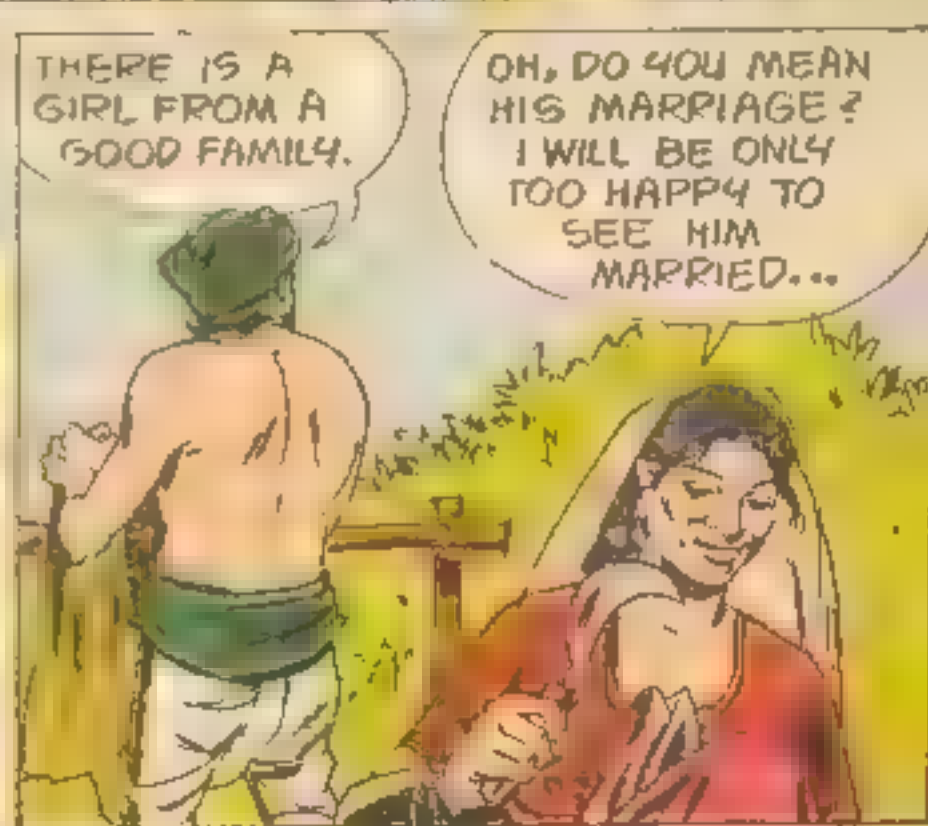
PARMA, HOW MUCH LONGER SHALL WE HIDE FOOD, MONEY AND GEMS FROM OUR OWN SON?

HE HAS BECOME A STRANGER TO US. WILL HE RUN AWAY ONE DAY TO BECOME A SADHU? I COULD NOT BEAR TO LOSE MY SON.



YOU WILL HAVE TO BEAR LOSING HIM

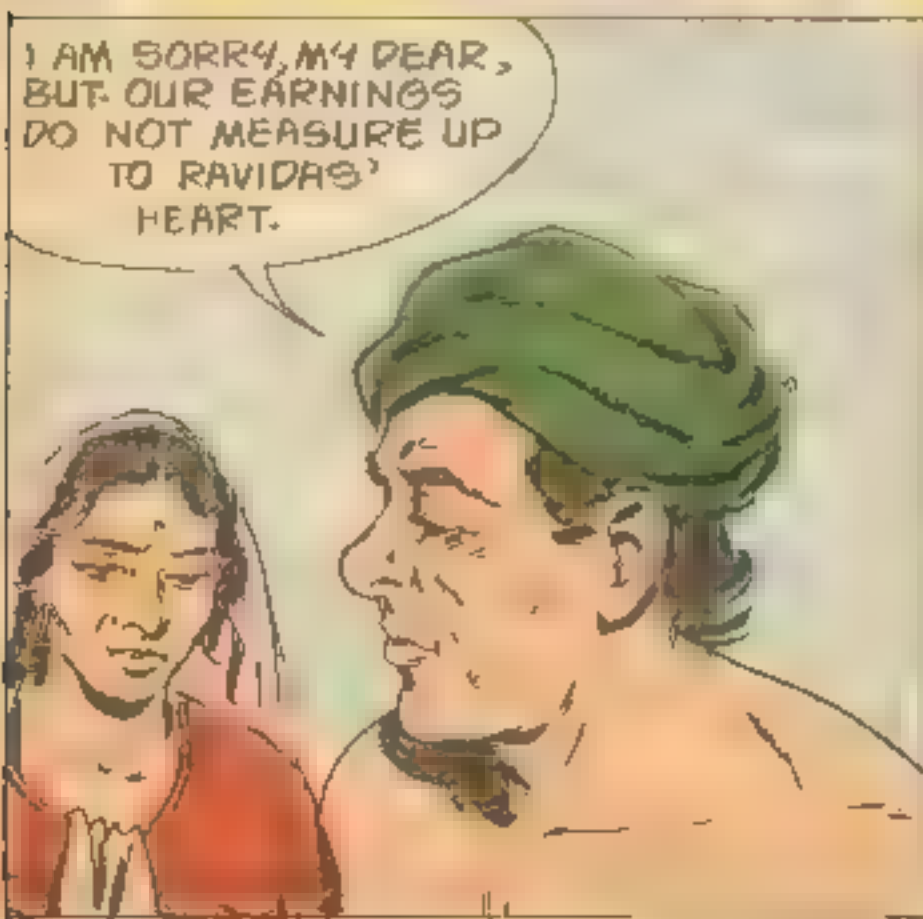
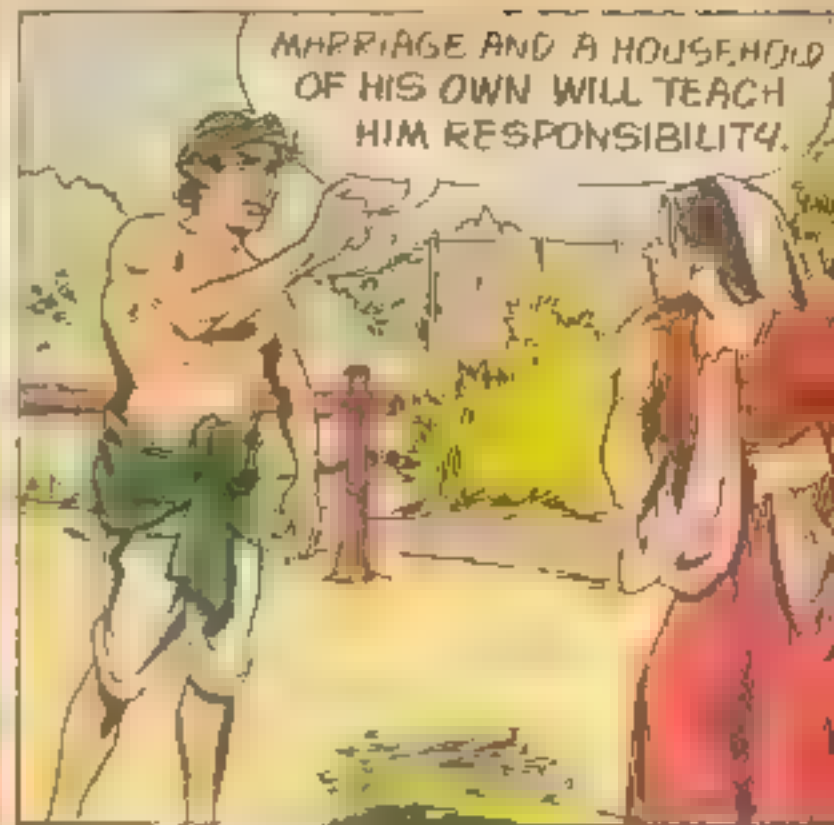
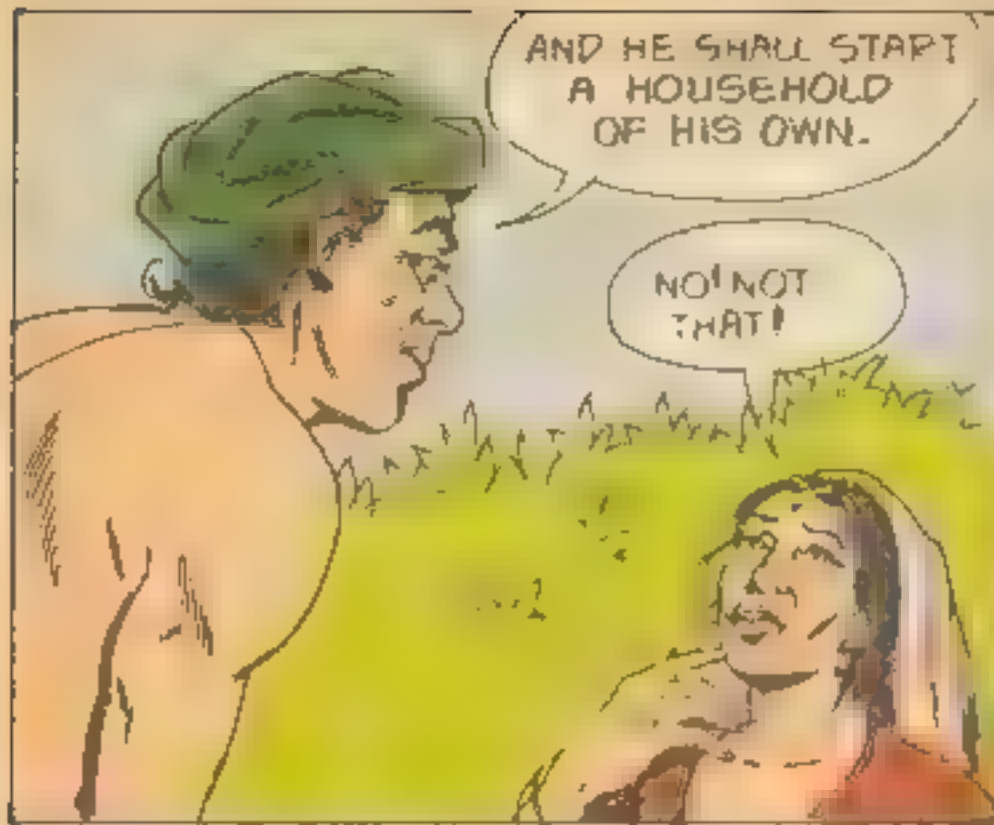
WHAT!



THERE IS A GIRL FROM A GOOD FAMILY.

OH, DO YOU MEAN HIS MARRIAGE? I WILL BE ONLY TOO HAPPY TO SEE HIM MARRIED...

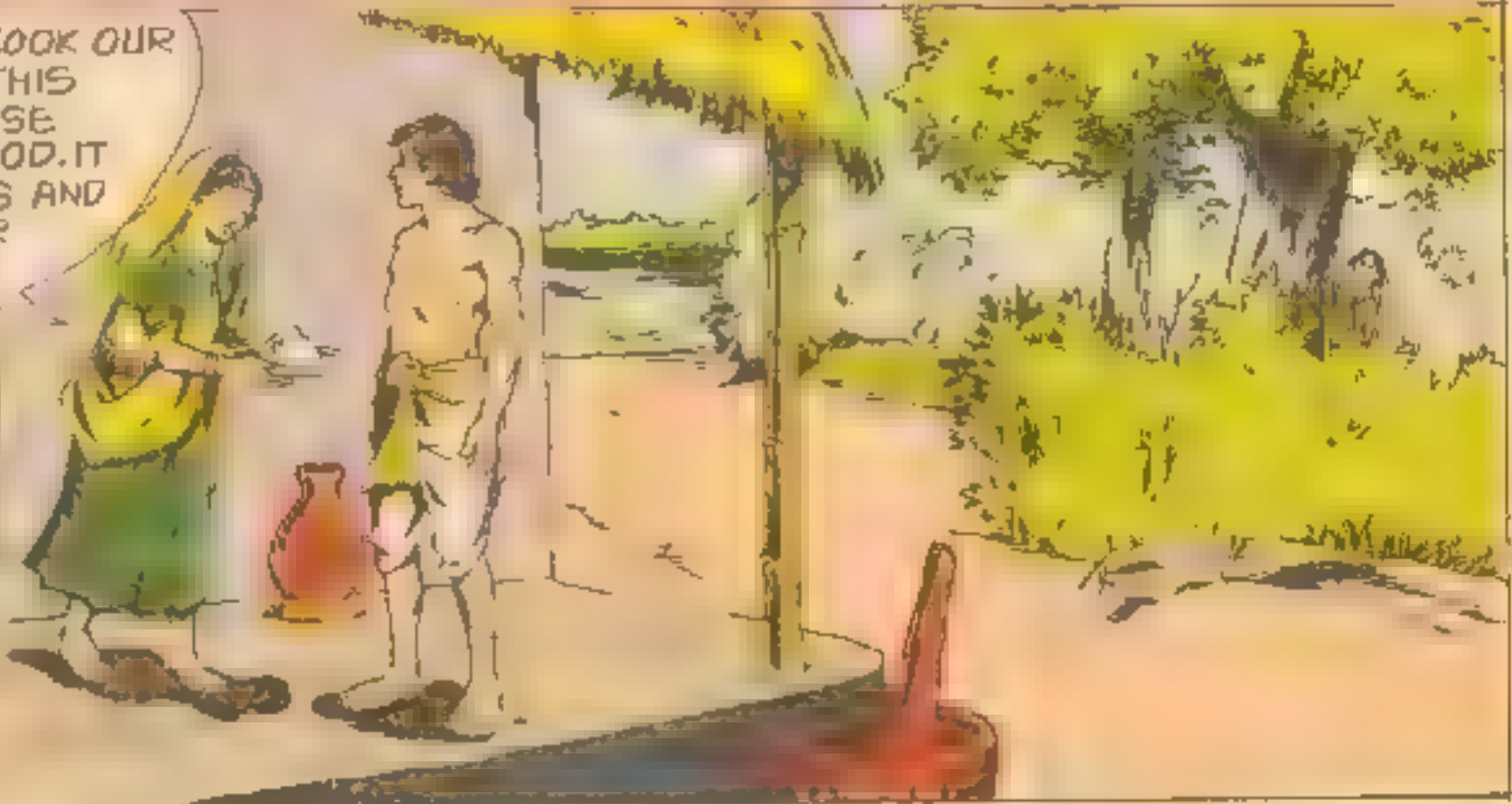






THE NEXT DAY WHEN RAVIDAS MOTHER WENT TO VISIT THEM SHE PAUSED A WHILE BEFORE SHOWING HERSELF AND WATCHED HER SON AND DAUGHTER IN-LAW

I AM GOING TO COOK OUR FIRST MEAL IN THIS HOUSE. SO PLEASE TOUCH THIS FOOD. IT IS AUSPICIOUS AND SPECIAL FOR BOTH OF US



THERE, BHAGWATI, BUT MIND YOU, WE MUST EAT HIS SPECIAL FOOD TOGETHER

BUT SHOULD I NOT SERVE YOU FIRST AND THEN EAT?



IF YOU DO THAT, THEN HOW CAN I FEED YOU, AND YOU FEED ME AT THE SAME TIME?



HMM... PERHAPS HIS FATHER KNEW HIM BEST



JUST THEN -



ALAKHI!

ALAKHI!



ALAKH  
NIRANJAN!



BHAGWATI, GOD HAS BEEN GOOD.  
HE HAS GIVEN US THE OPPORTUNITY  
TO PUT THIS FOOD TO THE BEST  
USE

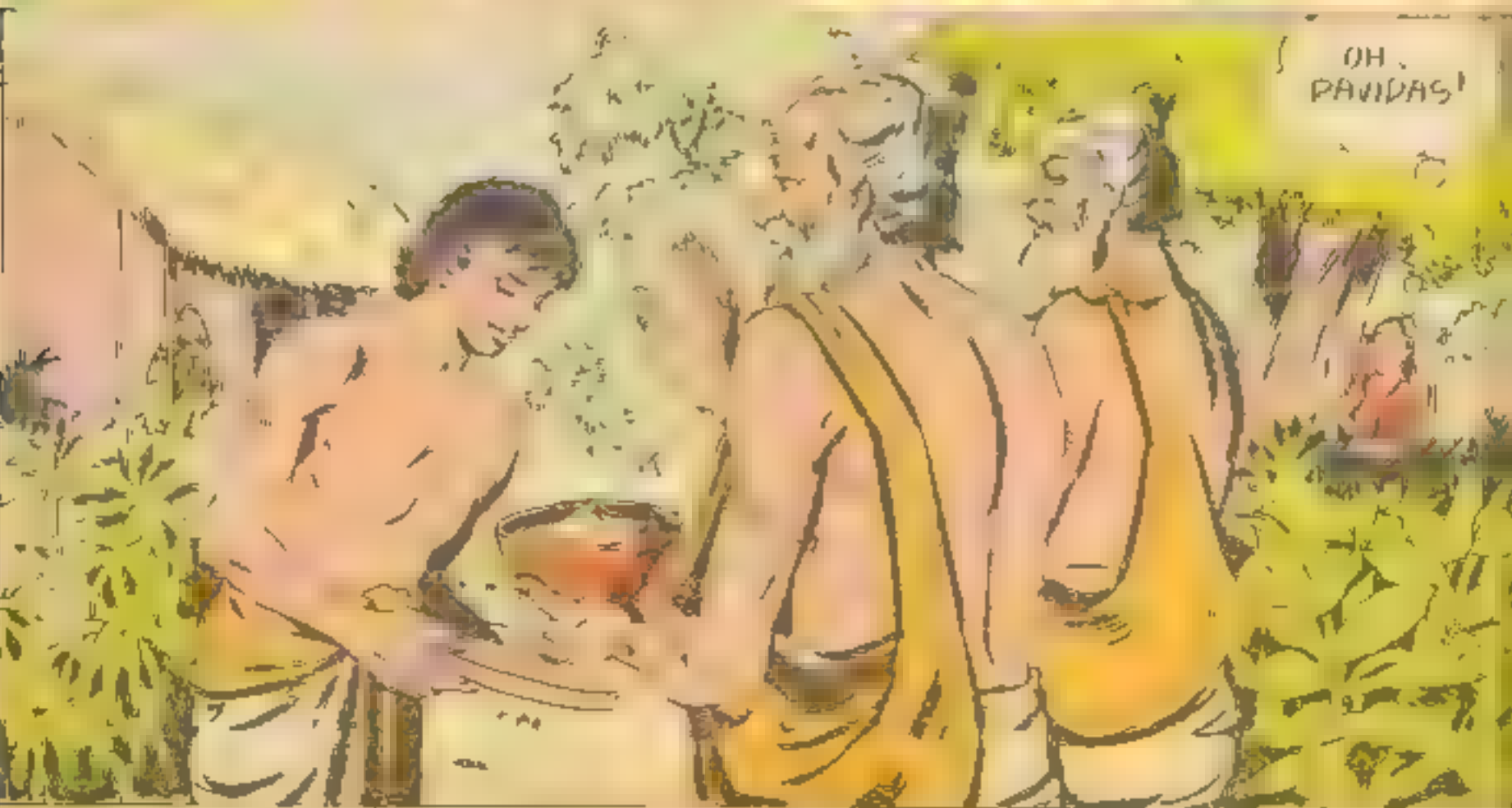


BUT... BUT  
OUR FIRST  
MEAL



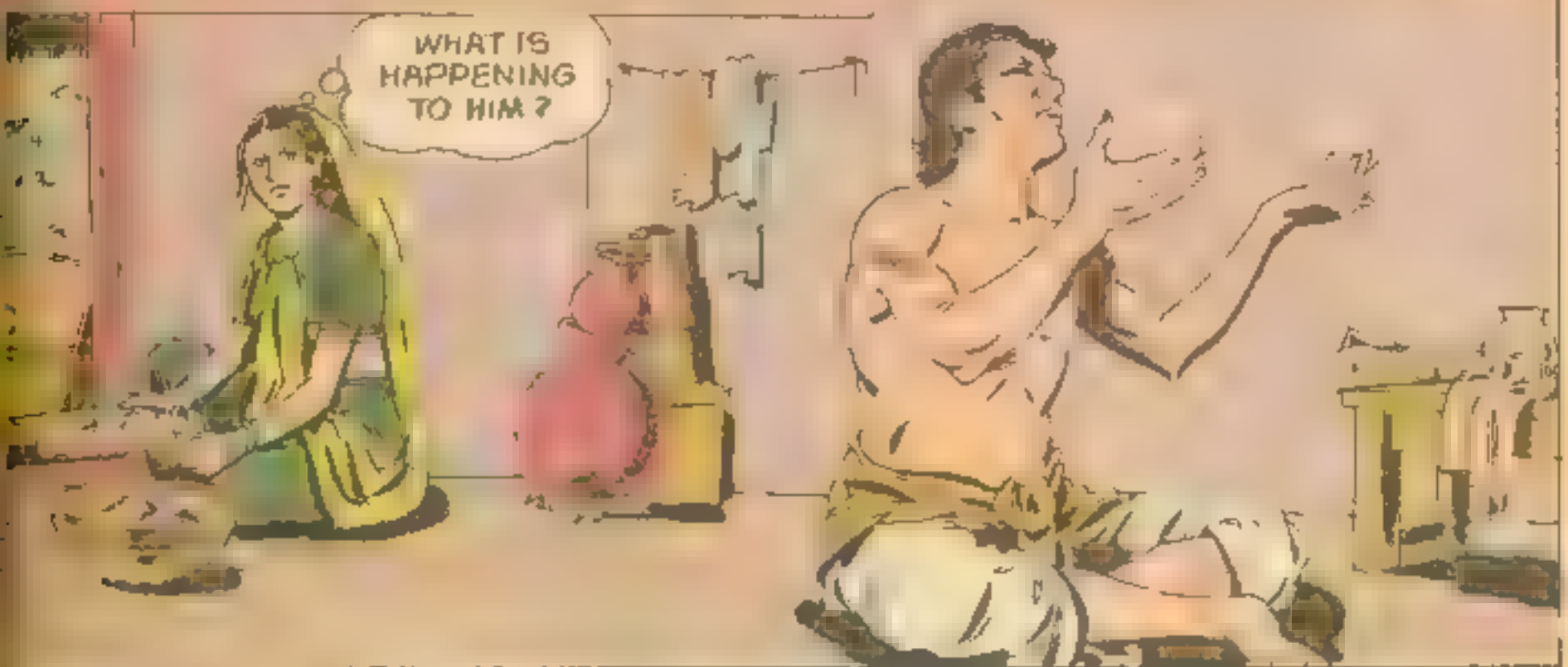
HOLY GIRLS,  
PLEASE ACCEPT  
THIS

OH,  
PAVIDAS!





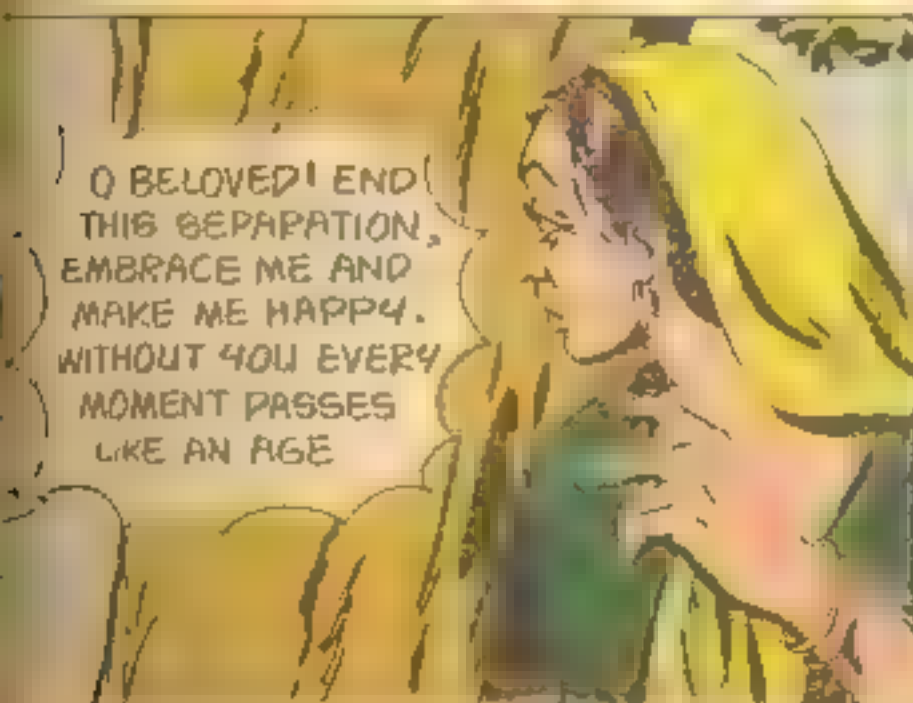
RAVIDAS AND BHAGWATI CONTINUED TO LIVE IN THEIR HUT BUT SOON BHAGWATI NOTICED THAT THE SENSITIVE MAN WHO WAS HER HUSBAND WAS GROWING MOPE AND MORE WITHDRAWN; MORE AND MORE SILENT



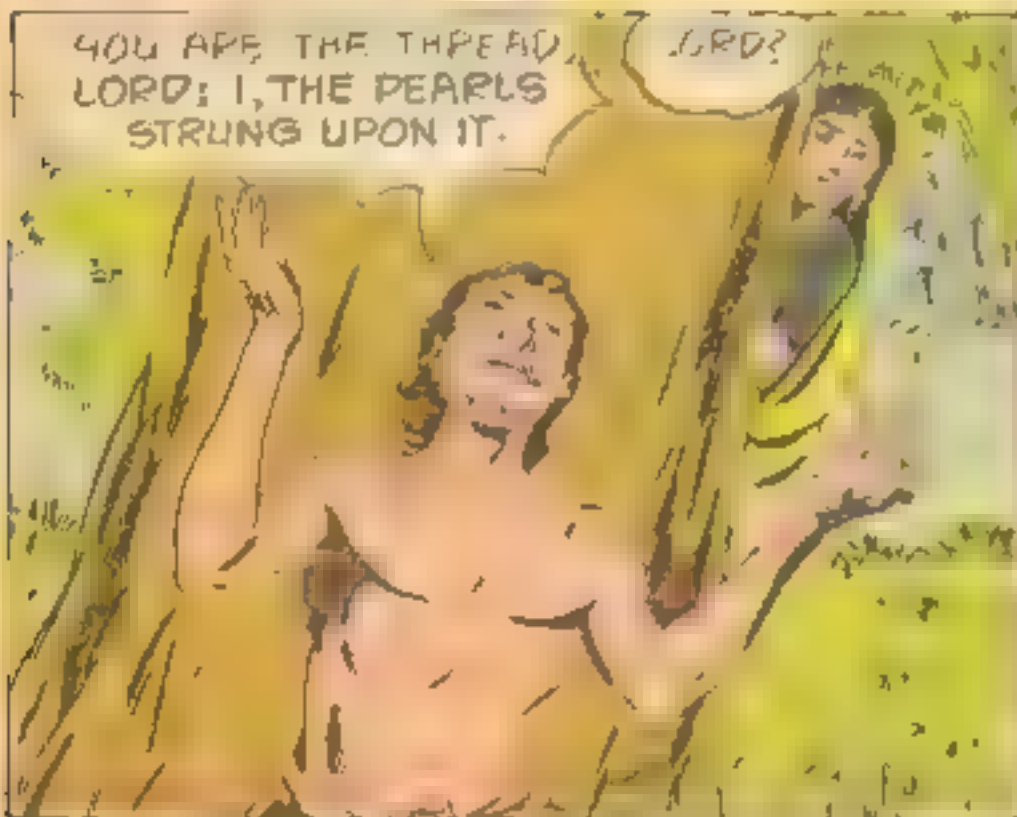
ONE DAY, WHEN SHE RETURNED FROM THE FOREST WITH A LOAD OF FIREWOOD, SHE SAW RAVIDAS SITTING UNDER A TREE



SHE CAME AND HID BEHIND IT TO SURPRISE HIM WHEN —





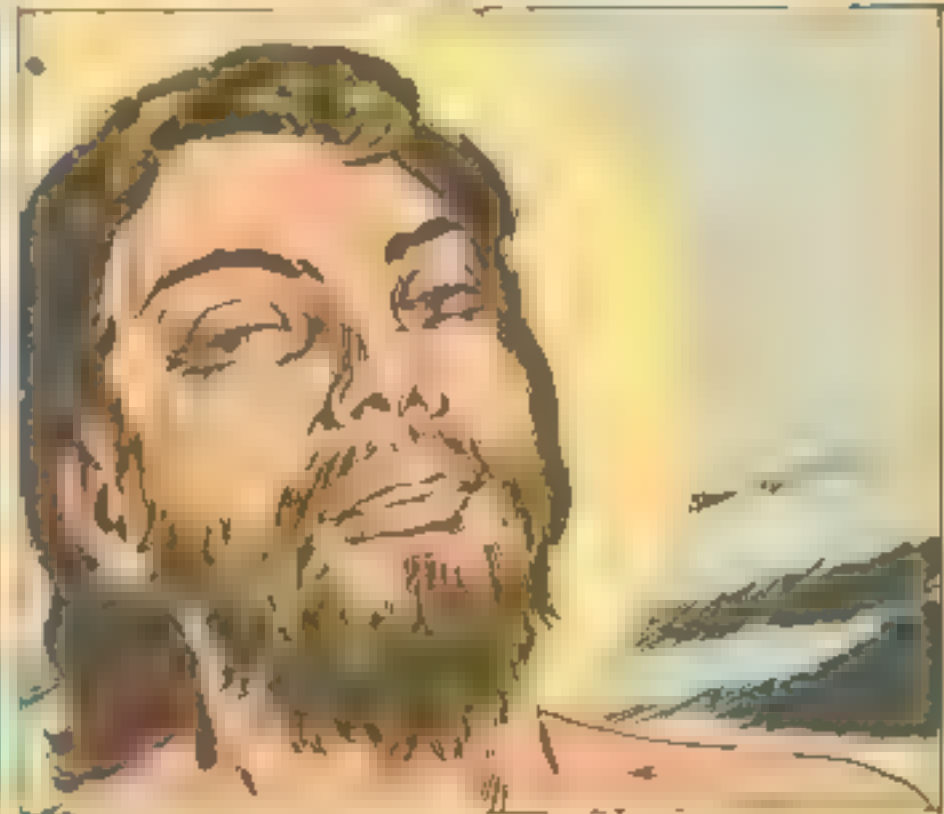
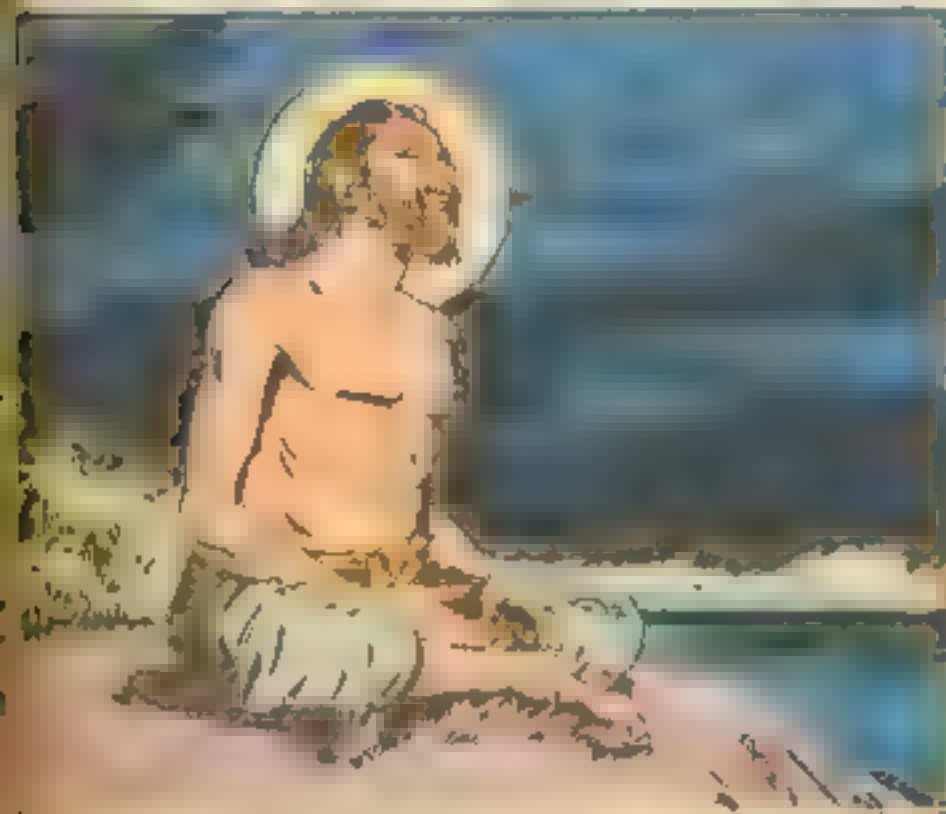
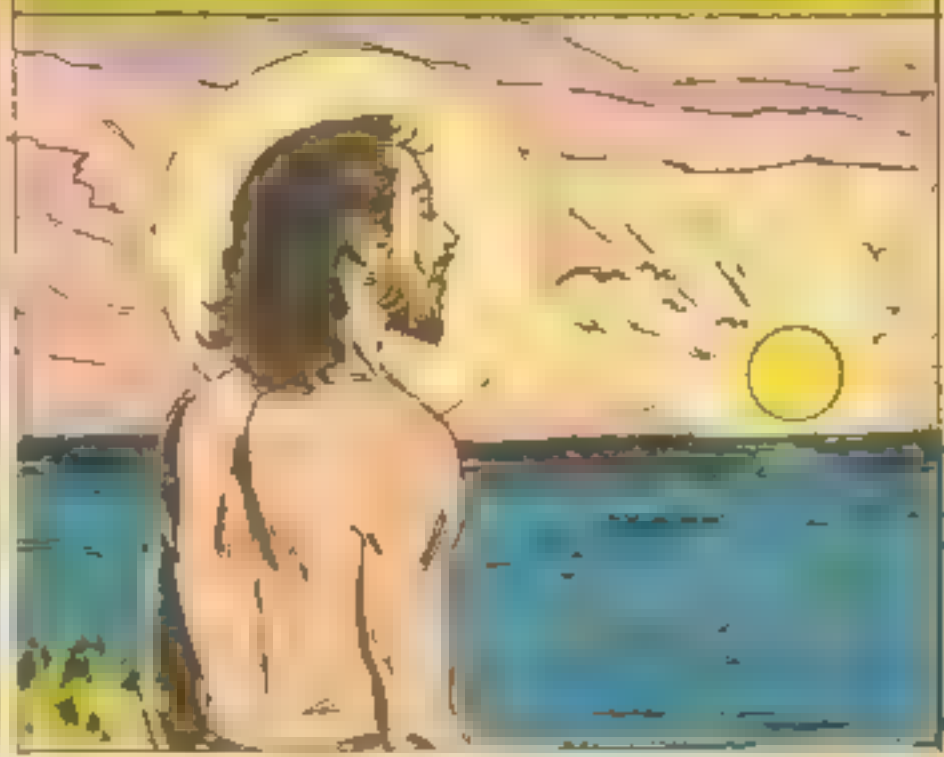




AFTER THIS, DAY AFTER DAY, RAVIDAS' THIRST GREW AND GREW...



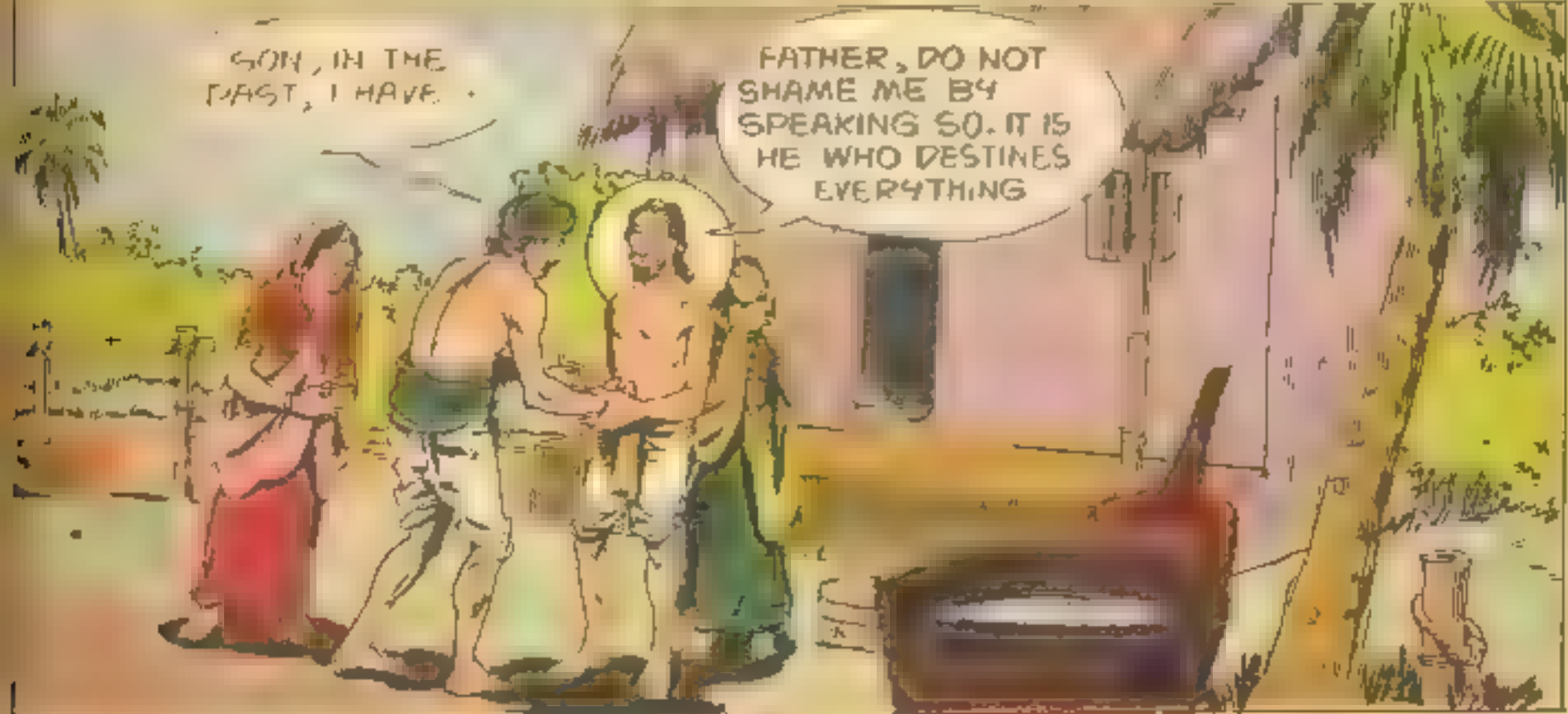
TILL AT LAST, IT WAS QUENCHED.



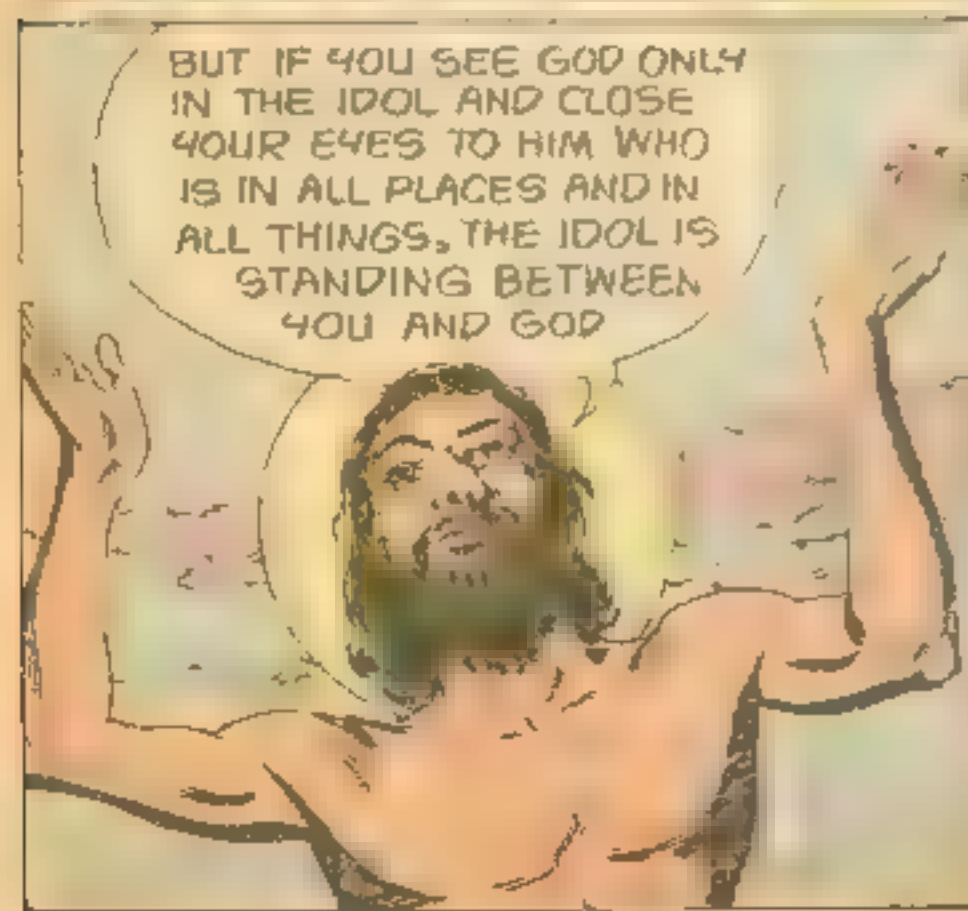
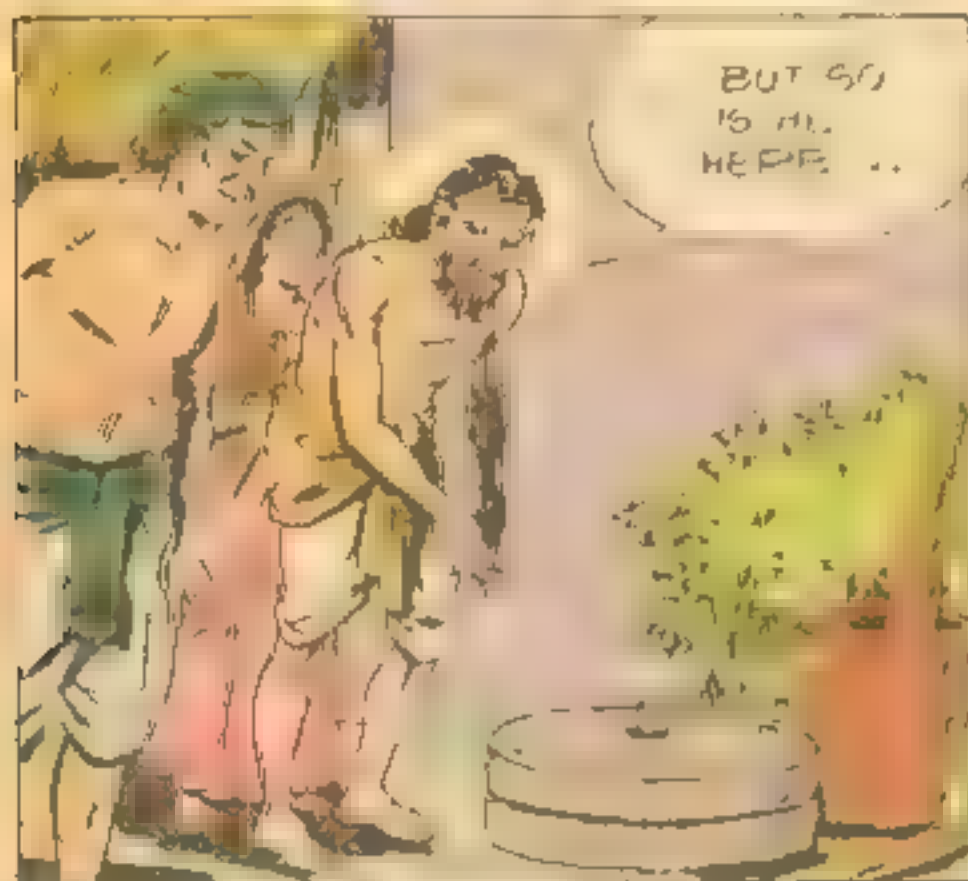
AND WHO SHOULD FIRST NOTICE IT, BUT RAGHAV KARMADEVI AND BHAGWATI?

SON, IN THE PAST, I HAVE...

FATHER, DO NOT SHAME ME BY SPEAKING SO. IT IS HE WHO DESTINES EVERYTHING

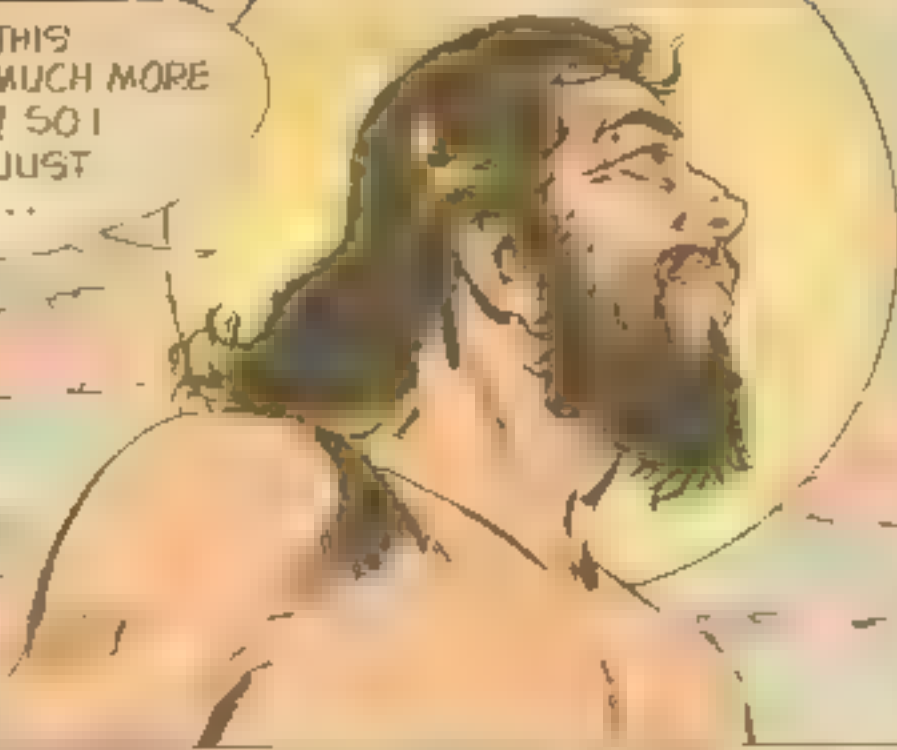






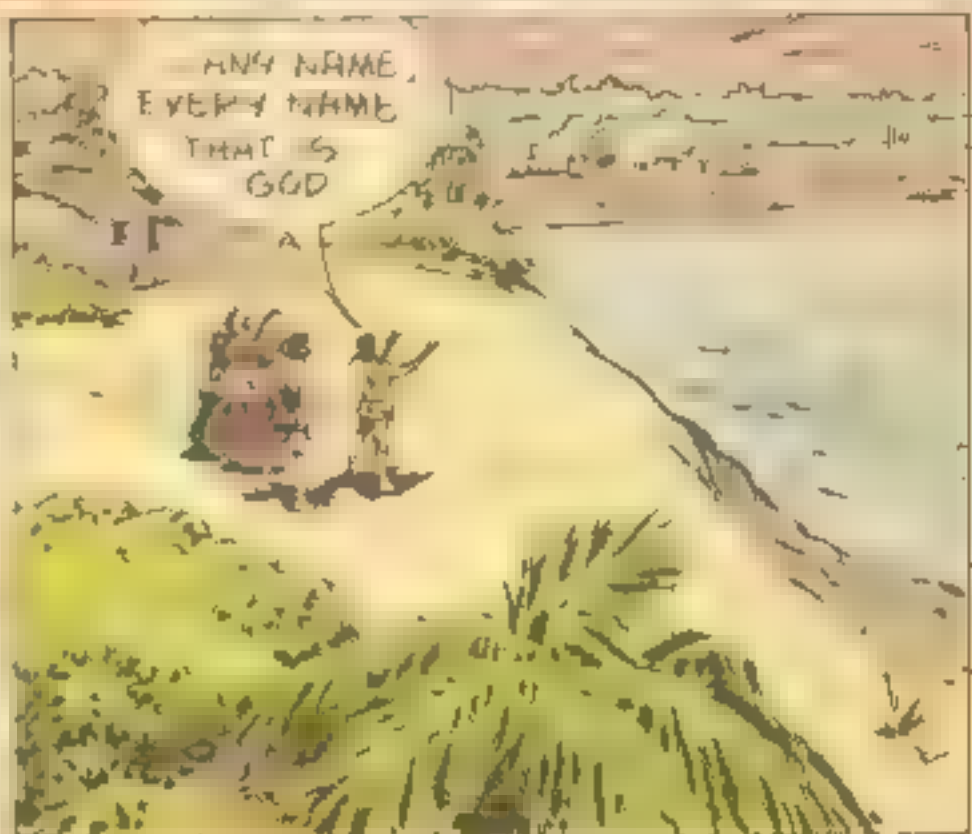


HE IS ALL THIS  
AND MORE; MUCH MORE  
HE IS ALL! SO I  
CALL HIM JUST  
THIS...



ALL  
H M  
NAME

ANY NAME,  
EVERY NAME  
THAT IS  
GOD



AS RAVIDAS' FAME SPREAD PEOPLE CAME TO SEEK HIS ADVICE AND GUIDANCE. PEOPLE BOTH OLD AND YOUNG WHOSE SELF-RESPECT HAD BEEN BROKEN BY CASTE

DO NOT BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF,  
DO NOT BE AFRAID OF CASTE  
DO YOUR WORK WITH DIGNITY  
AND BOW YOUR HEAD BEFORE  
NO ONE BUT GOD.



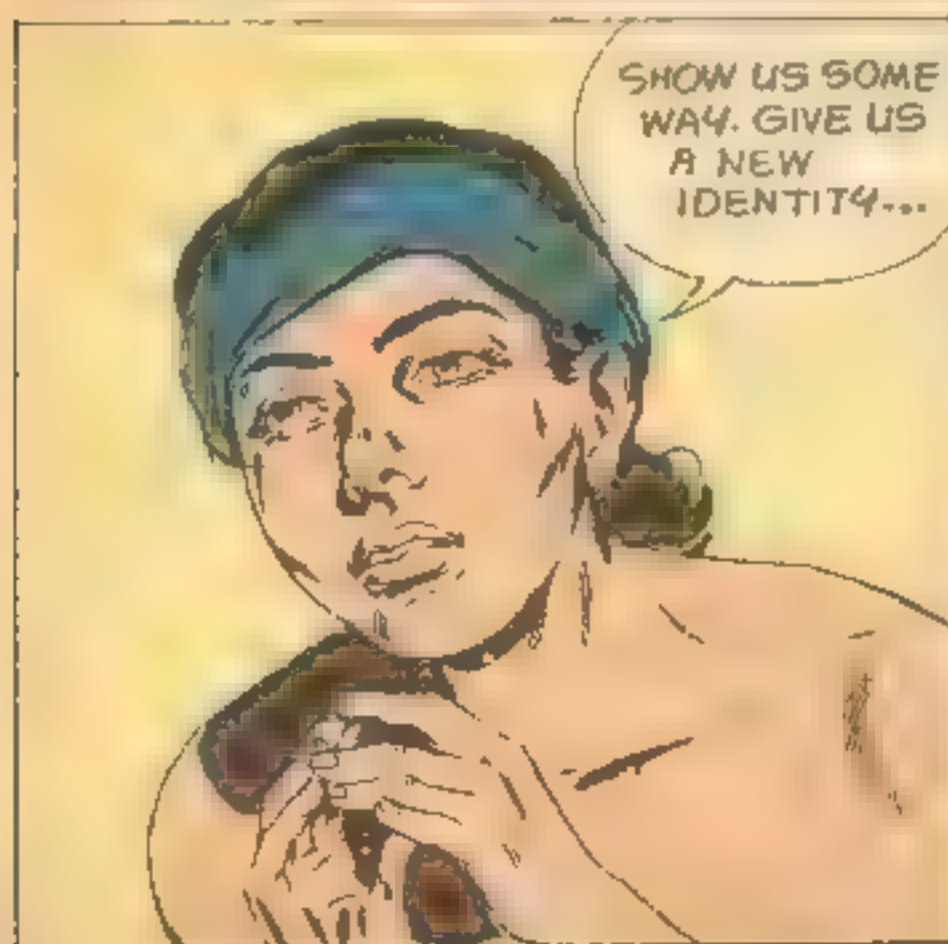




HOLY SIR, YOU ARE  
GREAT ENOUGH NOT  
TO BE AFFECTED  
BY CASTE, BUT...



...WHAT OF US,  
ORDINARY MEN,  
WHO HAVE NOT  
REACHED YOUR  
STATE?



SHOW US SOME  
WAY. GIVE US  
A NEW  
IDENTITY...

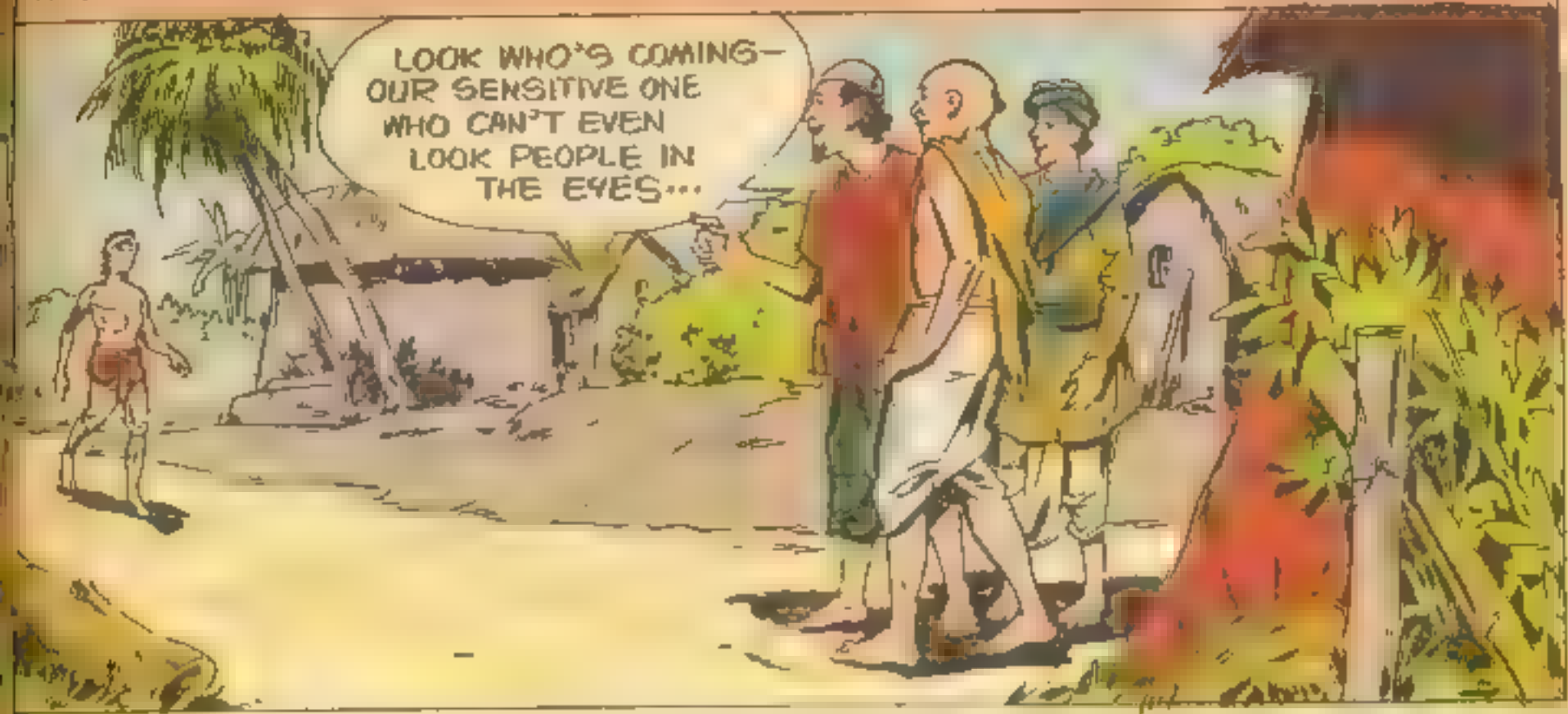


A NEW IDENTITY?  
ALL RIGHT, I WILL  
GIVE IT TO  
YOU.



WHEN THE YOUNG MAN LEFT THE SAINT, THERE WAS A SPRING IN HIS STEP

LOOK WHO'S COMING—  
OUR SENSITIVE ONE  
WHO CAN'T EVEN  
LOOK PEOPLE IN  
THE EYES...



AND EVEN IF HE  
DOES, HE DROPS HIS  
GLAZE AT ONCE LIKE  
A SHY BRIDE! WELL,  
WELL, HOW'S THE  
SHY BRIDE  
TODAY?

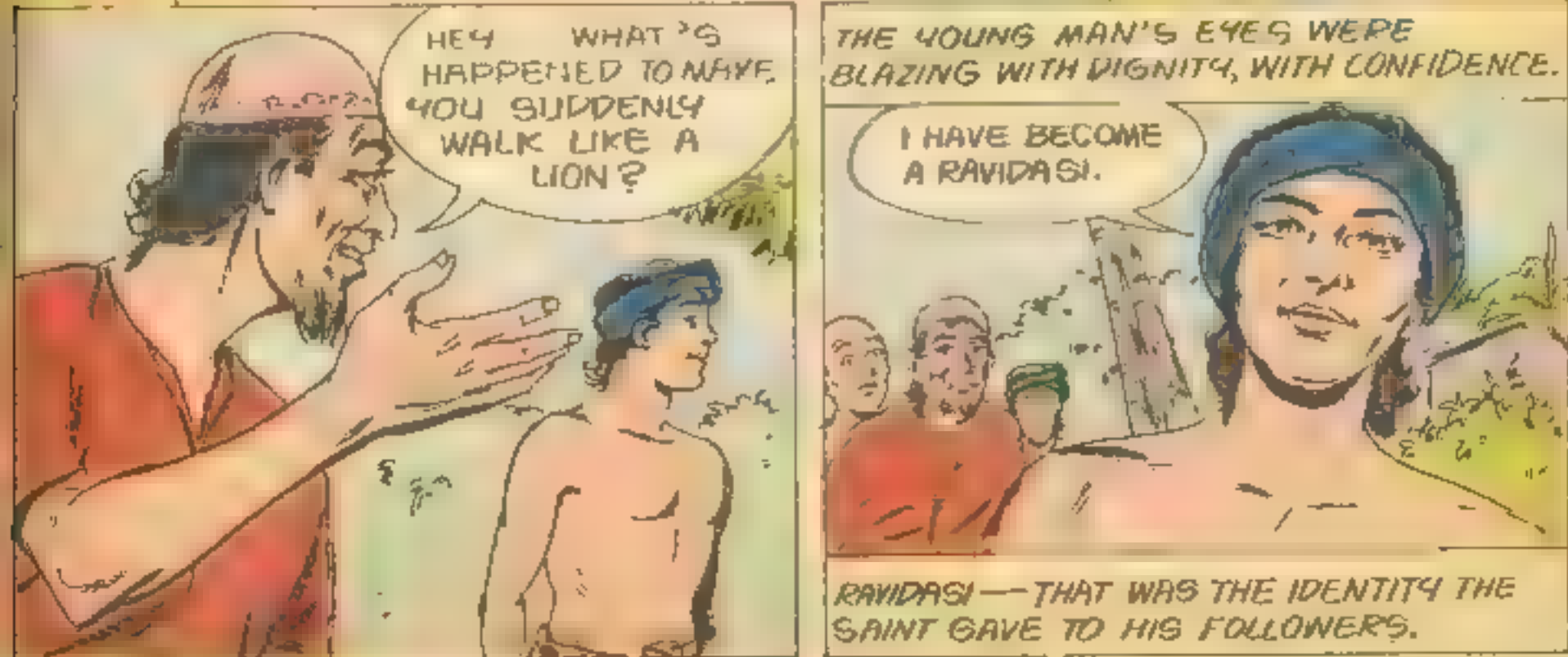
SHY BRIDE, DID YOU  
SAY? WHY, THAT'S NOT  
OUR USUAL MOUSE  
WHO'S COMING  
ALONG THERE!



HEY, WHAT'S  
HAPPENED TO HAVE  
YOU SUDDENLY  
WALK LIKE A  
LION?

THE YOUNG MAN'S EYES WERE  
BLAZING WITH DIGNITY, WITH CONFIDENCE.

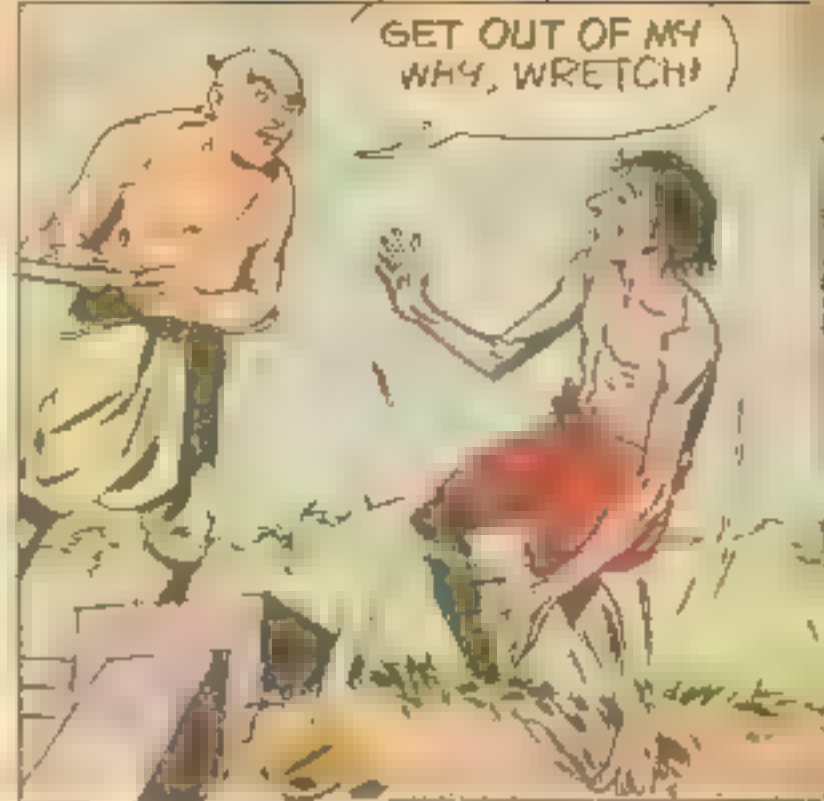
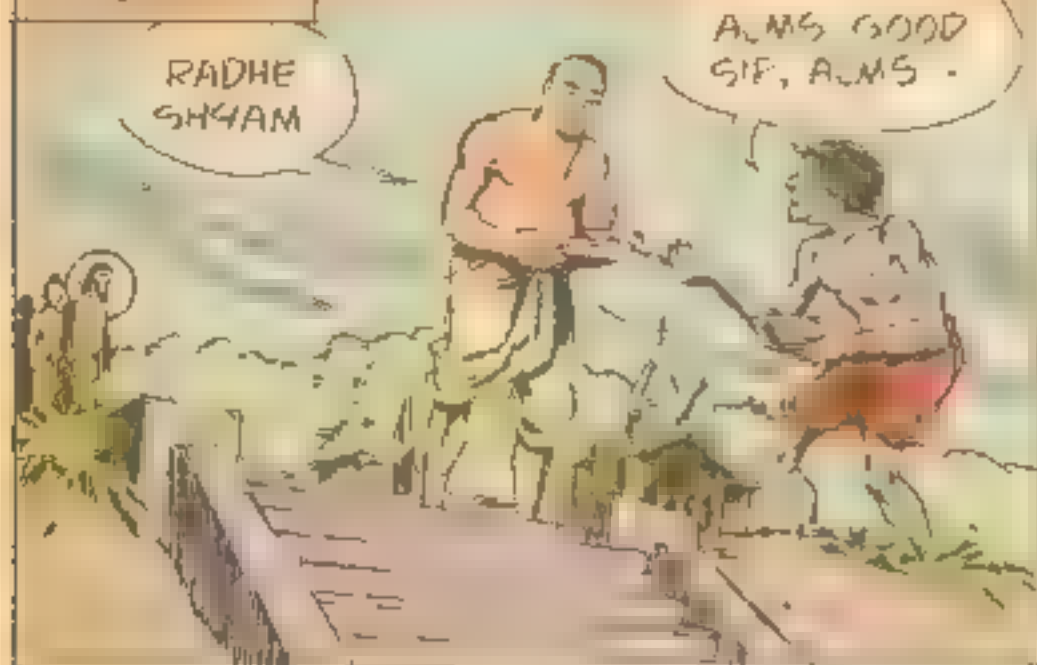
I HAVE BECOME  
A RAVIDAS!



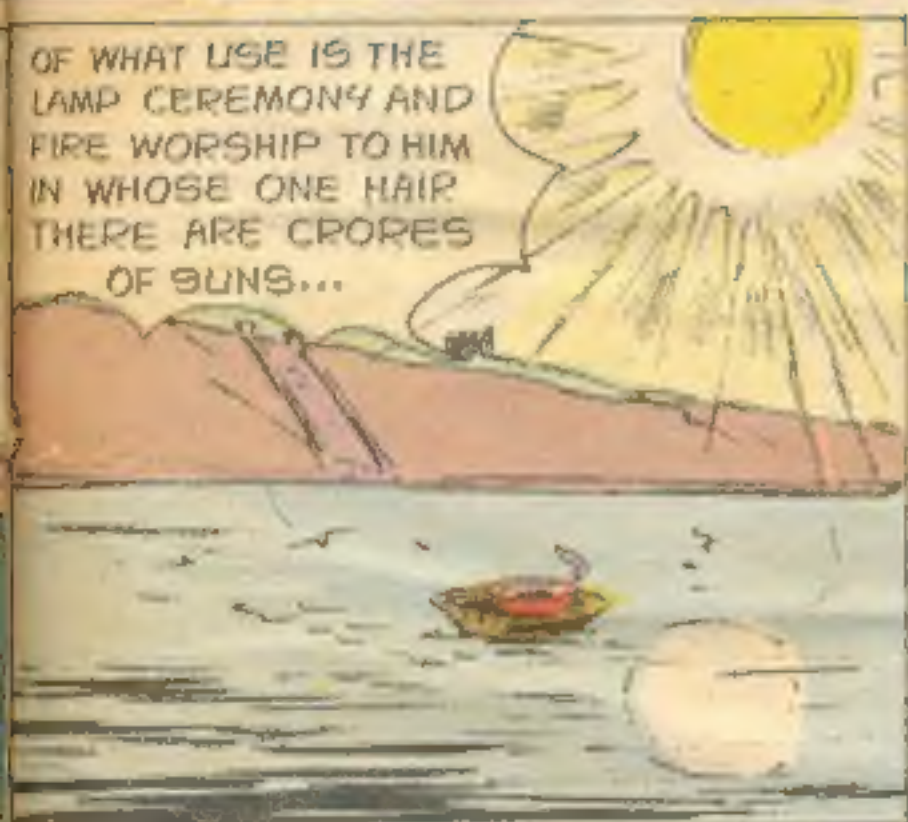
RAVIDASI—THAT WAS THE IDENTITY THE  
SAINT GAVE TO HIS FOLLOWERS.



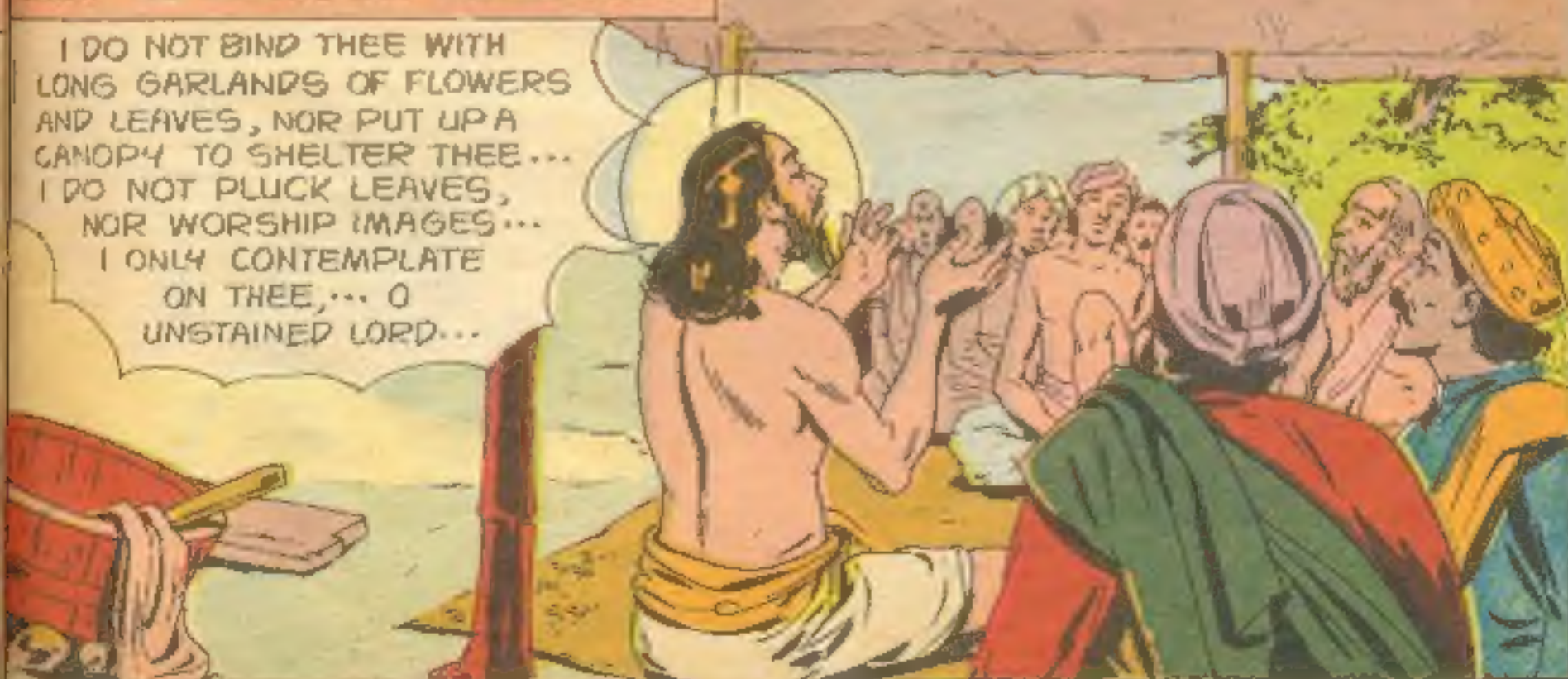
ONE DAY, WHEN GURU RAVIDAS AND HIS DISCIPLES WERE WALKING ALONG THE RIVER GANGA







IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, THE NUMBER OF GURU RAVIDAS' DISCIPLES RAPIDLY GREW AS DID HIS BODY OF VERSE.





HEARING OF RAVIDAS' GREATNESS, PEEPA, NANAK, SADHNA, SAINA, KABIR, OTHER SAINTS OF THE TIME CAME TO MEET HIM.



AND RULERS LIKE RAJA HARDEV SINGH NAGAR OF KASHI AND SIKANDAR LODHI OF DELHI PAID THEIR RESPECTS TO HIM.

ONE DAY, THERE WAS A KNOCK AT HIS DOOR.



WHO IS IT?  
COME IN.

THE DOOR OPENED AND THE CALLEE SLOWLY CAME FORWARD.



I AM MEERA.

I HAVE HEARD OF YOU, COME IN.



I HAVE BEEN SENT TO YOU TO BE CURED. MY LOVE FOR MY HUSBAND HAS DRIVEN ME MAD.



YES, I CANNOT BEAR TO BE PARTED FROM HIM FOR EVEN A MOMENT.





O MEERA, WHEN YOU ARE ONE WITH GOD, WHERE IS THE QUESTION OF SEPARATION?



LIKE A RIVER, YOU HAVE ENTERED THE WAVES OF GOD'S OCEAN.



GOD AND DEVOTEE HAVE BECOME ONE.



SO HOW CAN THERE BE TWO?



AS THE DAYS PASSED GURU RAVIDAS SPOKE IN THIS STRAIN AND MEERA LISTENED. AND THEN ONE DAY SHE SET THE IDOL DOWN.





PEOPLE WHO ONCE SPURNED THE YOUNG COBBLER BOY NOW BOWED BEFORE HIM.

हुनि हुनि हनि हनि हनि हुनि हुनि हैर ।  
हुनि विमलस्त जव  
अप जिहमतवि कवे ॥ १ ॥  
हनि के नाम कलीक उजागर ॥  
जुनस जुनस के काटे कागजर ॥ २ ॥  
निमत नारायित वृष्ट पीआइआ ॥  
तठ अउ जुनस संकट नही आइआ ॥  
जुन नखिद्वेष राखा रंजि दाता ॥  
हुन जुन परमादि नानक नही जाना ॥ ३ ॥



भाई के नाम कह्यो हैं मोहि बतअ  
 अत्य राम तकि  
 निकट न आओ ॥ टेक ॥  
 राम कहत अपन जगत भुजंगा,  
 जो यह नाम न होई ।  
 करम अकलम कल्याणाय केन  
 कलौ जाव नु कोई ॥ १ ॥  
 ज नामाहि सब अंग जानत,  
 सबत कुनै न छोड़ि ।  
 आप आप ते कोही न जानै,  
 कोन कोन नै जाई ॥ २ ॥

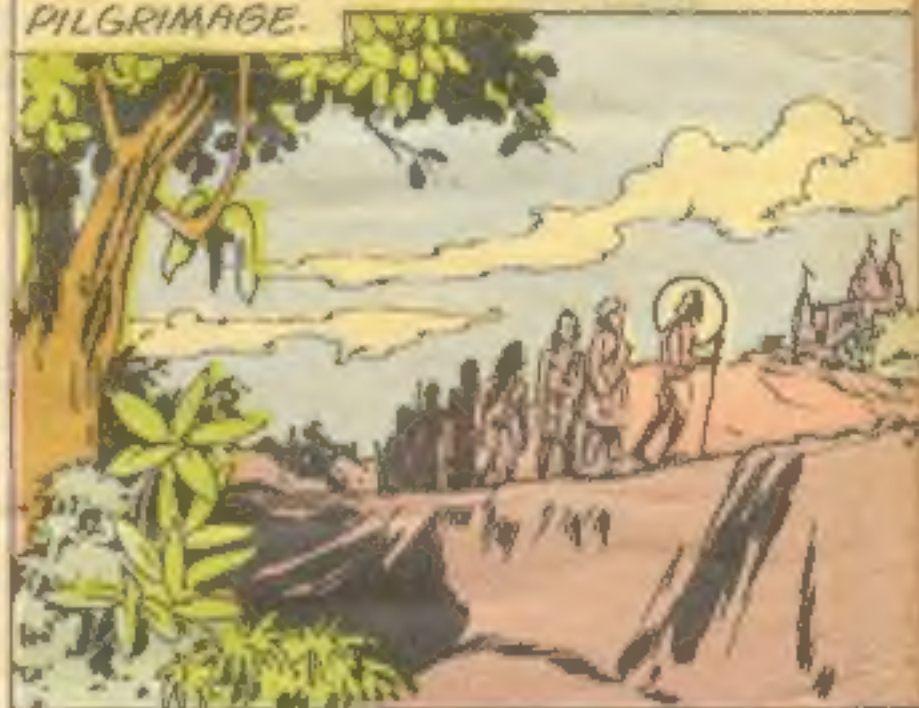
BUT TILL THE END OF HIS LIFE, GURU  
RAVIDAS WORKED AT HIS TANNING AND  
SHOE-MAKING.

THOSE WHO ARE  
COLOURED IN THE  
NAME OF GOD. WILL  
FIND NO OTHER  
DYE  
AGREE-  
ABLE.

SIR, I AM CERTAIN  
THAT YOUR VERSES  
WILL FIND A PLACE  
SOME DAY, IN SOME  
GREAT BOOK.



TOWARDS THE END OF HIS LIFE, GURU  
RAVIDAS UNDERTOOK A LONG  
PILGRIMAGE.



WHEN HE PASSED FROM THIS WORLD, HE LEFT BEHIND HIM, THE RAVIDAS (THE SECT THAT BORE HIS NAME) AND HIS SIMPLE BEAUTIFUL BANIS\*. HUNDREDS OF SHABDAS OF THE GURU ARE PRESERVED IN "ADI PRAKASH"; THE HOLY BOOK OF THE SECT. THIRTY-NINE OF THEM ALSO FIND A PLACE IN THE GREAT BOOK OF THE SIKHS - THE GURU GRANTH SAHEB.



AND DOTTED ALL OVER NORTHERN INDIA ARE SHRINES, PONDS AND ASHRAMAS BUILT IN HIS NAME

\* SONGS ("BANI" LITERALLY MEANS "VOICE"), + LITERALLY 'WORDS'